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**Activism through Commensality:  
Food and Politics in the Temporary Vegan Zone**

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ACTIVISM THROUGH COMMENSALITY:  
FOOD AND POLITICS IN THE TEMPORARY VEGAN ZONE

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**ABSTRACT**

**Keywords:** *global food system, diet, activism, commensality, counterculture, social movements*

Current issues and developments in the global food system of industrial meat production, distribution and consumption, and their detrimental impact on the environment have led various researchers and institutions to suggest that eating less meat and adopting a vegetarian - or even a vegan - diet would lessen the impact of GHG emissions into the environment.

In this ethnography cum dissertation I present the fieldwork that I undertook with an environmental activist group based in Lisbon, Portugal in 2009. During the fieldwork – 4 months of participant-observation – I have studied the *Jantar Popular* (JP) that GAIA (*Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental*), an environmental NGO, facilitates every Thursday of the week, except for August.

The food of the *Jantar Popular* is vegan, made with organic, GMO free, locally produced and socially just ingredients. A plate of food is available at cost price – currently €3,00 – or can be obtained for free by participating in any of the tasks at hand. This dinner is completely organized by volunteers, from planning the menu to cleaning up the space(s) at the end of the evening. Without volunteers there would be no dinner.

During the *Jantar Popular*, the eater is bonding through food with the other eaters. Thus, commensality becomes an ideal tool for putting environmental food politics into practice through ‘just’ eating in common. At the same time, the JP turns into a Temporary Vegan Zone (TVZ), in the vein of Turner’s ‘communitas’, as it becomes a temporary *place* where people can transcend their everyday experience of food.

This dissertation deals with the *Jantar Popular* as a ritual meal where the food consumed expresses the political and cultural choices in terms of diet of the participants, building and reinforcing at the same time a sense of community of belief among them.

## RESUMO

**Palavras-chave:** *sistema alimentar global, dieta alimentar, comensalidade, activismo, contracultura, movimentos sociais*

Os problemas actuais do sistema alimentar global de produção, distribuição e consumo industrial de carne e o seu impacto nocivo no meio ambiente levaram investigadores e instituições como a FAO a concluir que a ingestão de menos carne e a adopção de uma dieta alimentar vegetariana – ou mesmo «vegana»<sup>1</sup> – reduziria o impacto das emissões de Gases de Efeito de Estufa (GEE).

Do ponto de vista temático, o presente estudo etnográfico/dissertação tem como base o trabalho de campo que efectuei em 2009, observando e participando, ao longo de quatro meses, nas actividades de um grupo de activistas ambientais sediado em Lisboa. O estudo teve como objecto o «Jantar Popular»<sup>2</sup> (JP) que o GAIA – Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental, uma ONGA<sup>3</sup> – faculta todas as quintas-feiras, à excepção do mês de Agosto.

Esta organização pretende a mudança social através de «acções directas», de que o JP é exemplo, propondo a alternativa de uma dieta alimentar «vegana» como estratégia política para contrariar as pressões do sistema alimentar global corporativo relativamente à nossa dieta alimentar. No JP, o GAIA encontrou a ferramenta perfeita para exercer activismo político através da comensalidade. Quando as pessoas comem juntas, comungam em torno da comida. Ora, quando a comida servida se relaciona com as tendências económicas, políticas e sociais ao nível global, a refeição torna-se um ritual de consumo, o qual, por sua vez, se torna um acto político. Por outras palavras, durante o JP,

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<sup>1</sup> O termo «vegano/a», traduzido directamente do Inglês (*vegan*) refere-se a um estilo de vida e a uma dieta alimentar que implica o não consumo de produtos ou alimentos provenientes de animais vivos ou mortos (carne, lã, pele, mel, leite, ovos, por exemplo). Apesar de a palavra não ter sido ainda oficialmente adaptada à grafia e à fonética portuguesas, optou-se pelo termo que a organização objecto de estudo neste trabalho (GAIA) utiliza.

<sup>2</sup> Dado que a expressão «jantar popular» não é fácil de traduzir para Inglês, optei por mantê-la em Português no corpo do trabalho.

<sup>3</sup> ONGA: Organização Não Governamental de Ambiente.

o «comedor»<sup>4</sup> estabelece laços e cria afinidades com os outros através da comida. Embora óbvia, nem sempre se tem consciência desta função de comensalidade, mas a verdade é que o mero acto de comer em conjunto é a ferramenta ideal para pôr em prática políticas alimentares ambientais.

Paralelamente, o JP torna-se uma Zona Vegana Temporária (ZVT), na senda da «communitas» de Victor Turner, ou seja, como lugar onde as pessoas podem transcender a sua experiência quotidiana da alimentação.

Em suma, esta dissertação aborda o Jantar Popular na sua vertente de refeição ritualizada em que a comida exprime as escolhas políticas e culturais em termos de dieta alimentar dos participantes, desenvolvendo e reforçando simultaneamente a noção de que estes comungam de uma mesma crença.

Relativamente à estrutura da dissertação, esta está organizada em cinco capítulos. O capítulo inicial começa por apresentar o GAIA enquanto organização, descrevendo brevemente a sua história, a localização da sua sede e fornecendo outros dados presentes na respectiva página da Internet. Esta organização actua «protegendo o ambiente e protegendo o social». A criação de gado e a sua elevada contribuição para a emissão de GEE, bem como o desenvolvimento de sementes geneticamente modificadas enquanto factor de agravamento de injustiças sociais, são as preocupações genéricas do GAIA. Em seguida, é pormenorizada a descrição do JP, uma refeição «vegana» feita à base de ingredientes orgânicos não geneticamente modificados e produzidos localmente. Neste jantar, um prato custa 3 euros. Contudo, pode também ser obtido gratuitamente, caso se participe em qualquer das tarefas inerentes à organização do jantar, estando esta inteiramente a cargo de voluntários, desde o planeamento da ementa à limpeza do local de refeições ao fim da noite, o que significa que, sem voluntariado, não haveria jantar.

No capítulo dois, são inicialmente referidos os desenvolvimentos no sistema alimentar global que fizeram que algumas pessoas encarassem o acto de comer carne como um dilema ambiental: por um lado, o estatuto da carne causa um aumento de procura quando as pessoas têm mais dinheiro, mas, ao mesmo tempo, os métodos de produção industrial aumentam a oferta de carne a preços mais baixos. A este respeito,

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<sup>4</sup> Apesar de o termo mais utilizado em Português ser «comensal», preferi «comedor», mais próximo do conceito inglesa 'eater'.

além de serem apresentados alguns dados relacionados com o impacto ambiental da produção industrial de gado, é feito um resumo da história da política alimentar e suas consequências, as quais levaram a que a alimentação fosse incluída na Declaração Universal dos Direitos do Homem.

Em seguida, é explicada a ligação entre as sementes geneticamente modificadas e os direitos de propriedade intelectual. Descreve-se ainda a forma como a consolidação da indústria das sementes está relacionada com a desregulação governamental através do mercado livre, e é explicado o Acordo Agrícola do OMC.<sup>5</sup> É apresentado o conceito de soberania alimentar como uma crescente força global de resistência.

A última secção deste capítulo relata a forma como o excesso de produção através da Revolução Verde tornou possível a revolução na criação de gado e explica como este fenómeno pode ser um indício de que a revolução na criação de gado é conduzida pela produção e não pela procura.

O capítulo três descreve pormenorizadamente a «produção» do JP, desde a origem da ideia até à forma como esta é posta em prática pelos voluntários, e é brevemente traçado o perfil do público. O capítulo encerra com a descrição das actividades de teor político, sob a forma de debate público sujeito a um tema, que têm lugar previamente ao JP.

No capítulo quatro é discutido o papel da comensalidade como interface social, tanto outrora como no presente. São apresentadas algumas ideias acerca da emergência e da organização do activismo global contemporâneo através dos movimentos sociais (que não devem ser confundidos com organizações de movimentos sociais). O conceito de JP é «desconstruído» à luz da comensalidade e do activismo e, no decurso desse processo de desconstrução, é introduzido o conceito de Zona Vegana Temporária (ZVT). O capítulo termina com alguns comentários respeitantes ao possível significado do JP como expressão de «acção directa».

O capítulo final apresenta algumas conclusões preliminares e desenvolve a ideia de que a ZVT constitui uma oportunidade de partilhar e trocar ideias com outras pessoas a cada garfada, tornando o acto de comer uma afirmação de vida. No decurso do JP, o «comedor» encontra-se temporariamente liberto da pressão exercida pelas companhias

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<sup>5</sup> Organização Mundial do Comércio.

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globais ligadas ao ramo alimentar e consegue experienciar uma realidade alimentar alternativa.

Quanto à metodologia seguida, o enquadramento teórico do tema baseou-se em estudos científicos relevantes no que respeita à comensalidade, ao activismo social, ao ambiente e à alimentação no passado e no presente (livros, artigos em jornais, textos encontrados na Internet). Por sua vez, a componente prática deste estudo teve como base, como já foi referido, o trabalho de campo efectuado e durante o qual participei em todas as fases do JP, desde as compras e a confecção de pratos para cento e oitenta pessoas até à limpeza da cozinha e, inclusivamente, à reciclagem de garrafas de vidro. Foram feitas entrevistas semi-estruturadas a treze pessoas, fazendo algumas parte do grupo dos voluntários mais envolvidos na organização do JP e sendo outros comedores.

A novidade associada aos movimentos sociais contemporâneos é o facto de estes estarem a operar num conjunto novo de circunstâncias históricas – fazem parte da rede electrónica global. Logo, através destas redes, os novos movimentos sociais podem organizar-se de forma muito rápida. Na verdade, a Web tornou-se o cerne do activismo global. Anthony Giddens coloca a hipótese de estarmos a caminho de nos tornarmos uma «sociedade de movimentos sociais» que permitirá movimentos sociais sem constrangimentos de fronteiras nacionais.

A possibilidade de a sociedade passar a basear-se no movimento social faz com que o estudo de um grupo como o GAIA se torne particularmente relevante, permitindo compreender o modo como estas novas formas organizacionais são constituídas, o tipo de incentivos que movem os indivíduos que decidem agir e o funcionamento destas redes abertas.

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Though the subject of this dissertation is a weekly dinner, without the people who made it possible, there would not have been any. Thank you Inês, Mara, Sara, Ariana, Diana, Joana, Catrin, Pedro, Marcos, Bruno, Julian, Miguel and Hugo for taking me by the hand in the world of food activism and sharing your stories with me.

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I am also very grateful to the two Eduardas for translating and correcting the Portuguese abstract. Thank you!

My deepest gratitude I owe to Mário, my better half, whose unshaken belief in me kept me going. Thank you for putting up with me no matter what.

To conclude, one of the important things I have learned from writing a dissertation as a process is that you are only as good as your network, so thank you everybody who has wittingly or unwittingly helped me along the way. It has been quite a ride.

Yve le Grand



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AoA</b>	Agreement on Agriculture of the World Trade Organisation
<b>CPADA</b>	Confederação Portuguesa de Associações de Defesa do Ambiente
<b>CSGM</b>	Centro Sociál do GAIA na Mouraria
<b>(CSM)</b>	(Centro Sociál da Mouraria)
<b>ENGO</b>	Environmental Non-governmental Organisation
<b>EVS</b>	European Voluntary Service
<b>EYFA</b>	European Youth For(est) Action
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
<b>FBA-UL</b>	Faculdade de Belas Artes/ Universidade de Lisboa
<b>FC-UL</b>	Faculdade das Ciências/Universidade de Lisboa
<b>FCT-UNL</b>	Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia/ Universidade Nova de Lisboa
<b>FL-UL</b>	Faculdade das Letras/ Universidade de Lisboa
<b>FNB</b>	Food Not Bombs
<b>GAIA</b>	Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<b>GDM</b>	Grupo Desportivo da Mouraria
<b>GHG</b>	Green House Gas
<b>GMO</b>	Genetically Modified Organism
<b>IAASTD</b>	International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
<b>IEFP</b>	Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional
<b>IFPRI</b>	International Food Policy Research Institute
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>IPJ</b>	Instituto Português da Juventude
<b>IPR</b>	Intellectual Property Right
<b>JP</b>	Jantar Popular
<b>MA</b>	Master of Arts
<b>MST</b>	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>SAP</b>	Structural Adjustment Program
<b>SM</b>	Social Movement
<b>SMO</b>	Social Movement Organisation
<b>STWR</b>	Share The World's Resources
<b>TNC</b>	Transnational Corporation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade And Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNL</b>	Universidade Nova de Lisboa / New University of Lisbon
<b>VC</b>	Volunteer Chef
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>YEE</b>	Youth and Environment Europe

## INTRODUCTION

Mindful that deep-seated food values can influence how we see the world, I am struck by how much of the Anglo-American discussion of our future prospects has really been about our right and our ability to eat meat, especially beef. And yet until the recent boomlet in academic food studies, few scholars dared to put such an explicitly carnivorous spin on their analyses of future demography, environment and politics.

-- Warren Belasco, *Meals to Come, a History of the Future of Food*

Convivial tools are those which give each person which uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision.

-- Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*

Current issues and developments in the global food system of industrial meat production, distribution and consumption, and their detrimental impact on the environment have led various researchers and institutions to conclude, that eating less meat, and adopting a vegetarian - or even a vegan - diet, would significantly lessen the impact of greenhouse gas (GHG)<sup>6</sup> emissions related to livestock production into the environment (e.g. Goodland and Anhang 2009; Millstone and Lang 2008; FAO/LEAD report 2006; Pimentel and Pimentel 2003).

Although in 2006 I was well aware of the dependency of industrial agriculture on the input of fossil fuel, the link between livestock production and GHG emissions came as a complete surprise to me. All of a sudden supermarket advertisements offering cheap meat did not look innocent any longer. Indeed, how was it possible that a consumer could buy a kilo of beef for less than €5,00?

I decided to skip the little meat I was eating at the time altogether. My Portuguese mother in law, though she had eliminated beef from the family menu after the 'Mad Cow'

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<sup>6</sup> "Greenhouse gases are those gaseous constituents of the atmosphere, both natural and anthropogenic, that absorb and emit radiation at specific wave-lengths within the spectrum of thermal infrared radiation emitted by the Earth's surface, the atmosphere itself, and by clouds. This property causes the greenhouse effect. Greenhouse gases effectively absorb thermal infrared radiation, emitted by the Earth's surface, by the atmosphere itself due to the same gases, and by clouds. Atmospheric radiation is emitted to all sides, including down-ward to the Earth's surface. Thus greenhouse gases trap heat within the surface-troposphere system. This is called the greenhouse effect." (IPCC 2007, 81-82)

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scare in the 1990s, was genuinely upset by my announcement that I would no longer eat meat during family dinners, except for *bacalhau* or shrimp occasionally. “*O que vais comer?*”, she asked me, to which I answered that I would eat beans instead. I noticed that having me for lunch or dinner became a stressful event for her.

Thus I became interested in the question of how people who had changed their diet for environmental reasons, executed it in daily life. After unsuccessfully looking for vegetarians or vegans groups, I shifted my attention to what people do to express their concern with the environment through food.

The groundwork for this dissertation was laid in 2009, during four months of ethnographic fieldwork with a GAIA (*Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental*), an environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) in Lisbon, Portugal. Its main concerns are with protecting the environment and social justice. Since March 2008 it organizes a weekly vegan dinner called the *Jantar Popular* (JP) that is entirely run by volunteers.

I choose the JP as the subject of my research, as it has a clear observable structure that is independent of who is volunteering. However, without volunteers, there would not be a *Jantar Popular*.

### ***Structure***

Chapter 1. introduces GAIA as an organization and the *Jantar Popular* in particular: how GAIA describes itself and their history on their website and where they are located in Lisbon. As *Jantar Popular* is not so easy to translate into English, I describe briefly its roots and why I choose to use the Portuguese name.

In Chapter 2. I point out a few developments that turned meat eating into an environmental dilemma for some. I deal with the status of meat which causes an increase in demand when people have more money, while paradoxically industrial production methods increase the offer of meat at a lower price. I present some statistics related to the environmental impact of industrial livestock production. A brief history of food policy and its consequences is offered and how that led to food being included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Next the link between genetically modified seeds and intellectual property rights is explained. How consolidation in the seed industry is related

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to deregulation through free trade and the Agreement on Agriculture is analyzed in the next section. The concept of food sovereignty is introduced as a growing global force of resistance. In the last section of this chapter, I describe how the surpluses of the Green Revolution made the livestock revolution possible, and how this might be an indication that the livestock revolution is not demand – but production driven.

In Chapter 3. the origin and ‘production’ of the *Jantar Popular* is described in detail, as well as how it is undertaken by volunteers. In the next section, the public is briefly profiled. The chapter concludes with a description of the pre-dinner political activities in the form of a public debate based on a theme.

Chapter 4. deals with the role of commensality as a social interface, in ancient times and in the present. Next, I offer some thoughts on the emergence and organization of contemporary global activism through social movements, not to be confused with social movement organizations. With commensality and activism in mind, the *Jantar Popular* is deconstructed, and the concept of the Temporary Vegan Zone (TVZ) introduced. The chapter is concluded by some afterthoughts on what the *Jantar Popular* as an expression of ‘direct action’ might mean.

In Chapter 5. I draw some preliminary conclusions, and explore the TVZ, as an opportunity to think and exchange ideas with other people by means of every bite that is taken, making eating an affirmation of life. During the *Jantar Popular*, the eater is temporarily free to experience an alternative food reality.

### ***Methodology***

At the macro level, I have undertaken a literature study relevant to understanding the *Jantar Popular* as being a direct expression of a particular perspective on food and society through direct action and as a temporary place for experience. In the background research concerning food production and its environmental and social consequences, I have chosen to focus on industrial livestock production and not on fish and aquaculture fish farming, world population growth, or the threat to biodiversity. Each of these topics, through related to the problems resulting from livestock production, has its own specificities, that go beyond the scope of this ethnography.

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At the micro level I have undertaken nearly four months of fieldwork on location as a participant-observer.

As a participant, I have done all the chores that a JP volunteer would do. From cleaning the dining spaces at the end of the evening to planning the menu, from shopping for groceries to helping with the formulation of the principles of the JP, from cooking to scrubbing the institutional-sized pans and kitchen utensils. On many occasions I assisted in the kitchen, washing and chopping vegetables and cleaning up the kitchen counters. On two occasions I was the volunteer chef. The first time, about one hundred eighty people came to partake in the dinner - a rather emotional experience for me as the responsible cook. It was an assorted bean dish, a *chili sem carne* (chili without meat), accompanied by plain boiled brown rice and a red cabbage, carrot and raisin salad with a cilantro-lemon dressing with toasted sesame seeds on top. As a cook I think that nothing is more satisfying than to see people licking their plates clean afterwards, even if that is not a very elegant action.

I never served food or collected the money for a dish, because I did not want to be in the spotlight - I thought that would undermine my being there as an observer.

In that capacity I kept a diary of what I saw and what I heard people say in passing by or when sitting/standing next to me. I kept notes of things that struck me as curious, for example the fact that after a certain hour people stopped doing their dishes and cutlery. When I brought this up with Inês, the GAIA coordinator, we concluded that it was because the dishwasher was too dirty, and that it needed to be changed at least once during the evening.

I have visually documented the JP. The digital pictures I have taken can be found on the CD in the back of this dissertation. The pictures depict the various stages of the *Jantar Popular*.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with people who actively volunteered for the JP and some participants. (Thirteen people in total.) One thing they all - but one - had in common, was that at a certain stage during their lives, they had gone abroad to study in a student exchange program.

Another thing many people had in common was that they had been vegan at a certain stage in their lives, but later reverted to being vegetarian or even eat some meat

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again. Only one of the interviewees, Sara,<sup>7</sup> was and still is a vegan to date. During the interview, she described the trajectory by which she became a vegan. Her story is not uncommon among teenagers who are becoming conscious of environmental problems related to industrial livestock production. Having access to the Web helps these young people to get information and look for interest groups.

Sara classifies herself as a grunge/hippie<sup>8</sup> during her teenage period. When she started to eat vegan, she felt alienated - a '*food alien*'<sup>9</sup> - because at the time she did not know any other vegetarians or vegans. She found solace in listening to the lyrics about animal rights and environmental issues by bands like *Lamb*<sup>10</sup> or Eddie Vedder and *Pearl Jam*<sup>11</sup>. As it was the beginning of internet, she read a lot online on Buddhist philosophy, Ancient Greek vegetarians like Pythagoras and nutrition. She also looked up statistics on food production. Thus environmental and economic issues concerning meat production entered her life when she was about 17 years old. She began to realize that the Amazon and other rain forests were rapidly being cut down, to provide farmland for crops and animals for the food industry.

For Sara, environmental activism is also about food activism. It is where environmental activism becomes personal. She observes that in general, activists tend to focus a lot on calling attention to the issues they are concerned with but when it comes to their own eating or consumption habits they are often not aware of any inconsistencies.

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<sup>7</sup> Sara was born in Lisbon in 1982. At sixteen she cut out all meat from her diet, because of '*the question of meat coming from a cadaver*'. Nevertheless, she still ate fish and shell fish. At 17 she skipped the fish and the shells from her diet as well, but continued to eat cheese and yogurt. Spiritually, Sara felt confused with eggs but kept eating them initially. In 2000, Sara enrolled in Communication Design at the Faculdade de Belas Arte-Universidade de Lisboa (FBA-UL), where she found some fellow vegetarians. In 2003, she went for two semesters to Spain on an Erasmus exchange program.

<sup>8</sup> 'Grunge hippie' as a contemporary subculture, was a lifestyle revolving around thrift store shopping, eating organic, locally grown, vegetarian, and/or vegan food. 'Grunge' is a subgenre of alternative rock that emerged in the USA, particularly in the Seattle area, starting in late 1980s, with among others the band *Nirvana*, whose singer Kurt Cobain had way of dressing up in faded jeans, and plaid flannel shirts. A bit later in the 1990s, there was a retro-hippie movement, drawing on 1960s counter culture fashion, like tied-died t-shirts and crocheted cardigans.

E.g. [http://www.apparelsearch.com/Definitions/Fashion/1990\\_Fashion\\_History.htm](http://www.apparelsearch.com/Definitions/Fashion/1990_Fashion_History.htm) - retrieved 12/02/2009.

<sup>9</sup> Literally as if she came from another planet where the food was very different.

<sup>10</sup> An alternative rock band from San Francisco.

<sup>11</sup> Another very successful grunge band from Seattle, whose singer, Eddie Vedder was a vegetarian.

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During interviews I always asked the interviewees to define vegetarianism and veganism. Each person had his or her own private interpretation. For some it was about lifestyle, for others it was about diet. So for the sake of this ethnography, I would like to define *vegetarianism* as a diet that avoids meat, fish, fowl or any protein coming from *dead* animals, but with dairy products – milk, yogurt, butter, cheese etc – and/or eggs. *Veganism* is a diet without *anything* coming from animals, including honey, bee pollen etc. and leather and wool in clothing.<sup>12</sup>

The *Jantar Popular* can be considered a ‘consumption ritual’, as described by Cele C. Otnes in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007, 753):

At such events, individuals engage in both consumption and other behaviors with actions that can be characterized as formal, serious and intense. They [the rituals] are distinct from other more mundane consumption laden activities to the extend that **they provide opportunities for individual and social transformations which may be temporary or permanent.** (Bold by YIG)

This dissertation deals with the *Jantar Popular* as a ritual meal where the food consumed expresses the political and cultural choices in terms of diet of the participants, building and reinforcing at the same time a sense of community of belief among them.

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<sup>12</sup> When she turned vegan, Sara realized that she possessed a lot of leather coming from ‘cadavers’. This caused a dilemma of what to do with the leather. Throwing it away seemed like a wasteful thing to do, as the object had already been acquired. Giving it away was a better option. Stuff nobody wanted, she kept using until it fell apart. Today, e.g., she is still using a pair of *Doc Martin’s*, the quintessential alternative 1990s, laced boots, which she got when she was 15 years old. Since then she has not bought anything made out of leather. She does think that recycling leather objects is better than destroying them. The biggest problem with abstaining from leather is to find good shoes for the winter, as plastic or imitation leather shoes do not keep your feet warm. “*Nowadays with new developments in materials, vegan shoes and boots are much better, but they are very very expensive and hard to find in Portugal.*”

## Chapter 1. GAIA & THE JANTAR POPULAR

GAIA is what the people who are there at the moment want it to be.  
--Mara, during interview

Before describing the *Jantar Popular* (JP), a few words about the organization that facilitates the JP to take place, GAIA – *Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental*.

### ***What about GAIA?***

One of the core concepts of modern environmental activism is the Gaia Hypothesis, as formulated by James Lovelock in the late 1960s. In brief, the hypothesis holds that the earth is functioning as a single, self-sustaining unit, with qualities that might be regarded as sentient (Wall 1994, 78). It can therefore hardly be a coincidence, being an environmental NGO, that the acronym of this group is GAIA.<sup>13</sup> What or who is GAIA?

On their website, GAIA proclaims to be:

GAIA - Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental is a Portuguese environmental NGO formed in 1996. It was founded in Lisbon and it is active at national and regional levels. It has offices in Lisbon, Porto and Alentejo. GAIA cooperates with other Portuguese associations and takes part in many European networks. GAIA has a strong activist component, resorting to creative and non-violent direct actions and promoting work from the grassroots in a plural and non-hierarchical way. It addresses ecological problems by criticizing the social and economical model that exploits and harms our planet, our society and our future generations. In parallel, it looks for positive alternatives for a world based on social justice and ecological sustainability. GAIA is one of Portugal's leading environmental associations.

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<sup>13</sup> In Ancient Greece Gaia is the primal goddess personifying the Earth.



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GAIA has currently a national campaign against GMO (genetically modified organisms) in agriculture.

GAIA is a member of EYFA (European Youth For(est) Action); YEE (Youth and Environment Europe); CPADA (Confederação Portuguesa de Associações de Defesa do Ambiente), Plataforma Transgénicos Fora and several other networks.<sup>14</sup>

Online, in Portuguese<sup>15</sup>, GAIA states it is: “*an ecological organization that is innovative, plural, nonpartisan and non-hierarchical.*”<sup>16</sup> And that, “... *despite its official status as a registered not for profit association with written statutes, it maintains its horizontal structure as it was, before officially becoming a youth organization (in 2000) and an ENGO (in 2004). This enables GAIA to receive new activists and their ideas and to facilitate the realization of those ideas.*”<sup>17</sup> In the first place, it is GAIA’s mission to defend the environment.<sup>18</sup>

Some activities developed by GAIA to promote the ideas are, among others, the *Jantar Popular* - the subject of this dissertation, the *Trocal* (a kind of alternative economy or barter system in which time and knowledge are exchanged as currency. For example, you fix my bicycle tire and I will cook a meal for you.<sup>19</sup>), the *horta urbana*, an experiment in urban guerrilla gardening<sup>20</sup>, and the *loja grátis*, a place where you can leave clothes, books and objects or take them for free.

Other entities, however, see GAIA and its activities in quite a different light. In an article in the daily newspaper *Diário de Notícias* (DN 2009), a whole page was dedicated to radical groups associated with the extreme left in Portugal and how the authorities try to control them. GAIA was mentioned in several articles, as their presumed

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<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://gaia.org.pt/node/53> - retrieved 10/01/2009.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the English version.

<sup>16</sup> Translation by author from: “*uma associação ecologista, inovadora, plural, apartidária e não hierárquica*”. Source: <http://gaia.org.pt/node/327> - retrieved 10/01/2009.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>18</sup> Article 3., <http://gaia.org.pt/node/326> - retrieved 10/01/2009

<sup>19</sup> For more information: <http://trocal.pegada.net/lisboa/?q=node/1> - retrieved 10/01/2009

<sup>20</sup> The *horta popular* is an urban guerrilla gardening project by GAIA. Guerrilla gardening is political gardening, a form of direct action, primarily practiced by environmentalists to beautify bedraggled corners and unkempt public places.

participation<sup>21</sup> in 2007 in the destruction of a corn field planted with MON810<sup>22</sup> in the Algarve – declared a GMO free zone in 2004 by the local authorities – was called an act of eco-terrorism by the Portuguese Judicial Police in a report to Europol. This assessment of the situation resulted in the inclusion of Portugal on the Europol list of countries with instances of eco-terrorism (EUROPOL 2008, 40).

### *Physical location*

GAIA-Lisbon used to be located in an improvised container-office at the campus of the UNL in Caparica. After the corn smashing incident, GAIA was asked to leave the campus. The expulsion coincided with GAIA's desire to relocate to Lisbon. After a long search, GAIA found a sub-let in the old heart of Lisbon, in the *Palácio dos Távoras* in the Mouraria neighborhood, between Graça and the Baixa.

Since 1972, the old Távora palace, in the Rua de Nazaré in the Mouraria neighborhood in Lisbon, has been the seat of the *Grupo Desportivo da Mouraria* (GDM).<sup>23</sup> The GDM plays an important role in the social fabric of the neighborhood, where they have been inserted since its foundation in 1936. As a cultural and sports club, it is dedicated to promote fado music, the *marchas populares*,<sup>24</sup> Greek wrestling, boxing, football and table tennis, among other things.<sup>25</sup>

For €50,00 a month – “a symbolic amount helping to cover the costs carried by the GDM in renting the palace from the municipality” (Bruno, 24/04/2009), the GAIA-GDM protocol allots 7 rooms to GAIA.

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<sup>21</sup> GAIA denies any part in the organization and execution of the action in a press communication on 24 August 2007, <http://gaia.org.pt/node/2283>.

<sup>22</sup> MON810 is a variety of genetically modified corn, developed by the biotech-agro Monsanto corporation.

<sup>23</sup> Source: <http://mouraria.webs.com/histria.htm> - retrieved 05/02/2009.

<sup>24</sup> For the feast of Santo António, on the 12th of June, the residents of each neighborhood in Lisbon compete in a colorful street march, to the tune of music, and with a theme that is characteristic for the history of each neighborhood.

Source: <http://sarrabal.blogs.sapo.pt/81629.html> - retrieved 05/05/2009.

<sup>25</sup> Source: <http://mouraria.webs.com/> - retrieved 05/05/2009.

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On the first floor: the *Salão Nobre* – the State Room where the JP takes place in the winter until the practicing of the *marchas* begin in March; the *Salão dos Matraquilhos* – the billiard and table soccer room where one can dispose of bottles and cans in the respective recycle bins; the *Sala dos Reis* – the Kings’ Room, where films are projected and presentations are given, and outdoor terrace. – The *Sala dos Reis* (and the terrace) is where the JP moves to, weather allowing, when the *Salão Nobre* is occupied for the *marchas populares*. The food is then being served from the *Sala dos Reis*, and people eat there or outside, on the terrace that has an incredible view of the castle. (See Appendix I)

On the third floor: the office – the administrative heart of GAIA; the *sala de convívio/bibliotéca* - where people can hold meetings, relax and read books; the *loja grátis* (free shop) where people can bring in or pick up clothes and objects; the kitchen – the 9m2 where the volunteers prepare the dinner. (See Appendix II.)

Initially, GAIA called their presence and space in the palace the *Centro Social da Mouraria* (CSM), which the *Grupo Desportivo* did not like. The GDM felt that this new name in association with their current location, created confusion for the residents of the neighborhood. Things were settled, and GAIA now calls their presence *Centro Social do GAIA na Mouraria* (CSGM).

As my research focused on the JP as facilitated by GAIA, and not on GAIA as an environmental activists group, it seems logic to first explore the concept of a *Jantar Popular* (JP). As to why I chose this, I will come back later, in Chapter 4.

***Not simply a matter of translation***

An exact translation of the Portuguese *Jantar Popular*, is difficult. When I asked my informants about the origins of the JP, one of the aspects that was usually mentioned, was the German word *Volksküche*, literally meaning the ‘people’s kitchen’. Other possible translations could be: soup kitchen, potluck dinner, communal kitchen and community dinner.

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None of the translations seemed adequate for me, so I kept searching online with the word "volkskueche".<sup>26</sup> Two things kept coming up: 1.) the situation of communal lunches and dinners in squats in Germany in particular – VoKü in jargon,<sup>27</sup> and 2.) the *jüdische Volksküche*, referring to the soup kitchen concept in the context of new arrivals at the beginning of the Twentieth Century in a country due to geopolitics, of Jewish people who had been dislocated and were trying to build up a new life at a new location, starting at the bottom of the social hierarchy:

Volkskueche, literally ‘People’s Kitchen’ refers to a specific type of soup kitchen. Not wholly a charity, it was run by a non-profit group and the customers were charged only the cost of the supplies, which were bought in bulk. Most of the employees were volunteers, but there was a hired chief cook/manager. The intent was to serve the working poor more nutritious food than they might be able to afford for themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Conceptually and structurally, the above description of *Volkskueche*, comes very close to describing the *Jantar Popular*: GAIA is an ENGO, that has subsidies from the *Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional* (IEFP) and the *Instituto Português da Juventude* (IPJ), to employ up to two people to keep the activities going,<sup>29</sup> while the cooking is done by volunteers. The food is bought in bulk or comes from the *horta popular* and the purpose is to serve an affordable, eco-friendly, socially just and nutritious meal to the eater. To avoid losing the nuances of its particular intent in translation, I decided to stick to the Portuguese, to *Jantar Popular*.

An other source of inspiration that was often mentioned by informants when talking about the origin of the JP, was ‘Food Not Bombs’ (FNB), a volunteer-based organization that promotes non-violent social change through the concept of cooking for peace. The FNB symbol is a fist, holding a carrot. It was the brainchild of a group of anti-

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<sup>26</sup> In English, ‘ü’ is written as ‘ue’.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. in *The Guardian*, 12 July 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2009/jul/12/berlin-squat-music-food-parties> or in *Young Germany* 15 April 2008, [http://www.young-germany.de/yg/blog/blog-singleview/article/8dd195feae/volkskueche-eating-at-the-peoples-kitchen.html?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[year\]=&tx\\_ttnews\[month\]=&tx\\_ttnews\[day\]=](http://www.young-germany.de/yg/blog/blog-singleview/article/8dd195feae/volkskueche-eating-at-the-peoples-kitchen.html?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[year]=&tx_ttnews[month]=&tx_ttnews[day]=) - retrieved 10/01/2009.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-District/lida-city/postcards.htm> - based on Krauss, Samuel, "Aus der jüdischen Volksküche," *MJV*, LIII (1915), 1-40. - retrieved 10/01/2009.

<sup>29</sup> I will come back to this aspect at a later stage.

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nuclear activists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, in 1980, which spray-painted the slogan ‘Money for food, not for bombs’ around the city. They shortened it to ‘Food Not Bombs’, and it became the name of their group. Soon after, the group decided to put their slogan into practice. Since then, the idea behind FNB is to recover food that would otherwise be discarded, to cook it and serve it outdoors in public spaces to anyone without restriction.

Food Not Bombs shares free vegan and vegetarian meals with the hungry in over 1,000 cities around the world every week to protest war, poverty and the destruction of the environment. With over a billion people going hungry each day how can we spend billions on war? - FNB website.<sup>30</sup>

On its website, FNB has instructions on how to create your own group and how to deal with democratic group-consensus decision-making. The concept of consensus is extremely important within GAIA to which I will return to this later. A difference between FNB and the JP is that the food to be cooked for the JP is bought and not collected, and that, as a consequence, the eater has to pay a small amount to cover the cost. However, in case one is without money, there is a JP principle that exempts the payment if one volunteers to make the JP happen. I will explore in more detail in the next section its principles according to GAIA.

***‘Bem-vindos ao Jantar Popular’***<sup>31</sup>

One thing that struck me - from the first time I went to a JP, in January 2009 - was the sense of excitement that hung in the air. This sense of excitement surrounded not only first-timers, but also the people serving the food and the ‘regulars’, people that come (almost) every Thursday. To me, everybody seemed to function at a higher level of energy. Despite the cold and the rain outside, there were some 60 odd people either standing in line for the food, a vegetable stew with seitan, or already seated around the tables that were dwarfed by the high ceilings of the space – the *Salão Nobre*. As I was

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.foodnotbombs.net> - retrieved 07/01/2010.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Welcome to the *Jantar Popular*’.

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there with Virgil, my local host, I was introduced to some of the volunteers of the JP who told me what the JP was and what to do (e.g. to wash my own dish and cutlery).

As the number of eaters was rapidly growing by the week, it became unfeasible for the volunteers of the JP to speak with each and every new person, to explain the how and why of the JP. Thus the idea was born to have information posters around on the walls near the food and the dish washing area. Consensus being the *modus operandi* of the group, the wording of the principles and the reasons of the JP took at least a month. Until the handwritten general information board was completed, photo copies of instructional bits and pieces were taped to the wall.

On the main board the principles are preceded by an explanation of the ‘Jantar Pop’. While people queue, they can read on the main information board, strategically located near the serving table, that the JP of the CSGM: “(...) is a *non-discriminating space, that is open to all people who accept and respect that everybody is different, independent of their ethnicity, creed, nationality, sexual orientation, age or social status.*” (Translation by YIG. See Appendix III for the original.)

The JP is summarized as being:

- a vegan, community dinner, free from GMO;
- a space where different people can socialize;
- an initiative that is self-managed by GAIA volunteers;
- an independent project that is self-sustaining as the proceeds will go towards sustaining GAIA as a social center;
- an example of sustainable consumption, made with ingredients that respect the local economy, the environment and animals;
- an opportunity to whet your appetite for critical thinking, exchanging knowledge and divulging alternative and sustainable ways of living.

And:

- The first principle is that nobody will go without a meal, because lending a hand in (one of) the various stages that make up the JP, will get one a free meal.
- The second principle deals with the space, that it should be left behind in a better state than at the beginning of the evening.

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- The third principle points out that after eating, each person will have to wash his or her own plate. This is emphasized by the “*wash your own dishes*” poster<sup>32</sup> that can be found over the kitchen sink on the third floor and the dishwashing location during the JP.
- The fourth principle deals with the glass and packaging such as cans, from the drinks purchased at the GDM’s bar run by Sr. Gomes.<sup>33</sup> They should be taken to their respective bins, to facilitate the taking out by one of the volunteers for recycling at the end of the evening.
- The fifth principle states that one can smoke either near an open window, or in the designated smoking space.
- The sixth principle says that the space is a communal one in which each and everybody counts and participates.
- The seventh principle sums up the why of the JP, namely that the JP tries to give back a sense of importance to food, through the choice of ingredients that are socially just and ecologically responsible.
- And the eighth principle is an invitation to participate in the organization of the JP, as it is fully dependent on volunteers.

What is interesting in the description and principles of the *Jantar Popular* is that the JP is presented simultaneously as a *space* and a *vegan food event*. I will come back to this at a later stage.

Before describing the organization of the actual dinner in detail, it is worth looking more closely at the historical background that drives the desires and needs of the people who volunteer and organize the JP.

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<sup>32</sup> “*wash your own dishes*” is a metaphor for your status within society as explained by crimethInc, a network of ex-workers. (See appendix IV.)

<sup>33</sup> One of the stipulations between GDM and GAIA is that GAIA can **not** sell drinks. When people want a drink, they have to buy it at Sr. Gomes’s bar. Therefore I will not discuss what people drink, as it is not an integral part of the JP.

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Picture 1. Dish washing table in the *Salão Nobre*, 4 April, 2009



## Chapter 2. TO MEAT OR NOT TO MEAT, AN ENVIRONMENTAL DILEMMA

A persistent and widespread change in global agriculture with enormous aggregate impact raises profound issues for human health, livelihoods, and the environment. From the beginning of the 1970s to the mid 1990s, consumption of meat and milk in developing countries increased by 175 million metric tons, more than twice the increase that occurred in developed countries, and over half as large as the increase in consumption of cereals made possible by the 'Green Revolution'. (...) The population growth, urbanization, and income growth that fuelled the increase in meat and milk consumption are expected to continue well into the new millennium, creating a veritable Livestock Revolution.

-- Delgado et al. "*The Coming Livestock revolution*", 1999a

Feeding crops to animals for meat production is like feeding a person that will throw up the food afterwards: it is a waste.

-- Sara, during interview

According to Delgado et al. (1999a; 1999b), contrary to the Green Revolution that was supply-driven, the 'Livestock Revolution' is demand-driven. If this were the case, then one of the questions that come to mind is: in order to satisfy an increasing consumer demand, where do all these animals and the food they eat come from in the first place? In trying to answer that question, it is necessary to go back in time and look at the global food system.

I will focus on the environmental impact of the Livestock Revolution and how this came into being, as it is the main reason why the JP is a *vegan* dinner.

### *Mo' money, mo' meat, mo' problems*<sup>34</sup>

As alimentary diets go, research has shown that there is a tendency for people to eat more meat the moment they have more expendable income (Belasco 2006; FAO Newsroom 2006; Myers and Kent 2003; Tilman et al. 2001; Delgado et al. 1999a & b; Heinz and Lee 1998; Drewnowski 1995; Fiddes 1991; Tannahill 1988). Meat is considered, in many cultures, to sit at the top of the food chain (e.g. Pimentel et al. 2000).

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<sup>34</sup> More money, more meat, more problems, a wordplay on the title of the single "Mo Money Mo Problems" by rapper Notorious B.I.G..

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Historically meat, due to its scarcity was considered a luxury and was consumed ostensibly by the secular upper class (Elias 2000, 100). In a chapter aptly titled ‘The Mysterious Meanings of Meat’, Beardsworth and Keil (1997, 216) concluded that the opposition between: *“On the one hand, meat’s appeal for its human consumers is seen as rooted in its nutritional properties, particularly in its ability to provide a comprehensive range of nutrients. On the other hand, meat’s significance is said to reside in its symbolic charge, in it’s complex meanings relating to power, status, strength and gender which it can be used to convey.”* (1997, 217), is a false one, as the nutritional and symbolic meanings of meat are intrinsically intertwined, and feed on each other.

Nick Fiddes (1991, 13) states that: *“Time and again, in different contexts, cultures, social groups, and periods of history, meat is supreme. Within most nations today, the higher the income bracket, the greater the portion of animal products in the diet. (...) Meat is so significant that, all over the world, people describe a ‘meat-hunger’ that is unlike any other hunger.”*

The production of meat, however, is a costly process, as it involves many non-renewable natural resources such as land, water and fossil fuel to produce and process the crops that are needed to feed a rapidly growing number of industrial meat animals or livestock. I will narrowly focus on the relationship between livestock production, the environment and the growing, complex relationship among seemingly unrelated aspects of the global food system such as Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) on seeds and the concept of food sovereignty.

For brevity’s sake, I cannot digress into the effect livestock production has on biodiversity and the exploitation of animals, or its effect on public health (high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity). Nor do I take into account the increase in world population. The majority of the people I have interviewed changed their diet for environmental reasons. They often stressed that although horrible and unfair, the animal welfare issue was a ‘disgusting *consequence*’ of the expansion and concentration in the livestock industry, not the cause of the contribution to GHG emissions and their impact on the environment.

***Livestock revolution & pollution - some numbers***

When it comes to land use for livestock production, to produce, one unit of animal protein (=1kcal), meat production requires 6 to 17 times as much land as soy, depending on the kind of livestock considered<sup>35</sup> (Reijnders and Soret 2003). When water is in the balance, it requires roughly 12.5 times more water to produce a kilo of beef than a kilo of wheat (16 000 v.s. 1300 liter) (Pimentel and Pimentel 2003; Chapagain and Hoekstra 2004; Patel 2007). When it comes to fossil fuel,<sup>36</sup> Pimentel and Pimentel (2003, 661S) calculated that: *“The average fossil energy input for all the animal protein production systems studied is 25kcal fossil energy input per 1kcal of protein produced. This energy input is more than 11 times greater than that for grain protein production, which is about 2.2kcal of fossil energy input per 1kcal of plant protein produced.”*

Eshel and Martin (2005), examined the respective greenhouse gas emissions associated with plant- and animal-based diets and compared the impact of one’s dietary choice to those associated with choices concerning one’s personal transportation. (See also: Leitzman 2003; Baroni et al. 2006). They concluded that: *“For a person consuming a red meat diet at added GHG burden above that of a plant eater equals the difference between driving a Camry and an SUV. These results clearly demonstrate the primary effect of one’s dietary choices on one’s planetary footprint, an effect comparable in magnitude to the car one chooses to drive.”* (2005, 12)

In *Livestock’s Long Shadow* (FAO/LEAD Report 2006), the United Nations’ (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) drew attention to the need to address the negative impact of livestock production on mitigating climate change. In the report, Steinfeld et al. (FAO/LEAD Report 2006) calculated that the way in which industrial meat is produced, contributes more to the effect of global warming than the entire transportation sector in

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<sup>35</sup> In descending order of landuse: cows, pigs, sheep and chicken.

<sup>36</sup> In *Fossil Fuels - Oil, Food and the Coming Crisis in Agriculture*, Pfeiffer (2006) describes the intricate dependency on fossil fuel by the industrial food industry - for the production of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides and to run the machinery necessary to work large-sized monocrop fields and to transport the harvest to its next destination in a vertical production system that usually ends in supermarkets or fast food restaurants.

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the world: 18 percent versus 13 percent (p.XXI). *“Growing populations and incomes, along with changing food preferences, are rapidly increasing demand for livestock products. Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tonnes in 1999/01 to 465 million tonnes in 2050, and that of milk to grow from 580 to 1043 million tonnes.”* (2006, p.XX)

Some additional figures from this report: in 2002, 30 percent of all ice-free terrestrial land was used for grazing, and 70 percent of agricultural land was used to grow crops for animal feed.<sup>37</sup> In general, the expansion of land, for grazing or raising feed crops leads to land degradation, soil erosion and water pollution<sup>38</sup> and threatens the biodiversity (FAO/LEAD Report 2006, 271).

For gaseous emissions, the numbers are not encouraging either: besides the already mentioned 18 percent contribution to global warming through GHG emissions, livestock production contributed 9 percent of total carbon dioxide, 37 percent of methane and 65 percent of nitrous oxide. It was also responsible for 68 percent of ammonia emissions, which contributes to acid rain (FAO/LEAD Report 2006, 272 vv.).

In terms of global food security, the production of meat needed more caloric input than it provided in return: *“(...) livestock consume 77 million tonnes of protein contained in foodstuff that could potentially be used for human nutrition, whereas only 58 million tonnes of proteins are contained in food products that livestock supplies.”* (FAO/LEAD Report 2006, 270).

In other words: humans and animals are now competing for the same resources, which could drive up food prices, which would put even more stress on the world food system to produce more food, putting food security at risk.

In *Livestock and Climate Change*, a World Watch report, Goodland and Anhang

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<sup>37</sup> Currently Brazil is the worldwide leader in the production of soy beans for animal feed, at the expense of tropical rain forests.

<sup>38</sup> When looking at the local level, e.g. to water pollution figures in the United States, anno 2006 the world's largest economy, and the fourth largest landmass, livestock production is responsible for: 55% of erosion, 37% of the applied pesticides, 50% of antibiotics consumed, 32% of nitrogen load and 33% of phosphorous load into fresh water resources (FAO 2006, 273).

(2009) have come to even larger numbers than those in *Livestock's Long Shadow*. They have calculated that: “(...) *livestock and their by-products account for at least 32,564 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year or 51 percent of annual worldwide GHG emissions.*” (p.11).

One of the factors that explains the large difference in calculations, is that in the FAO report (2006, 95) ‘livestock respiration’ was not included in the calculations, “*as it is not considered to be a net source [of emissions] under the Kyoto protocol*” (2009, 11).<sup>39</sup>

Goodland and Anhang (2009) argue that livestock are a man-made invention and convenience, much like the car, which thus implies that every single livestock respiration emits CO<sub>2</sub> into the air, adding to the overall volume of GHGs.

If livestock production, processing and distribution today contribute more than half of the GHG emissions worldwide, then it seems that producing and consuming less meat would have a huge impact upon reducing these emissions. One of the ways to accomplish this would be for consumers to change their food habits and consume less or no meat.<sup>40</sup> As the increase is ascribed to a rise in consumer demand (Delgado et al. 1999b), a decreased demand for meat would send out a strong message to the meat production side, as less demand for meat would decrease the production of meat.

### ***Nothing comes out of thin air***

From an anthropological point of view, the question of what might be a more sustainable diet for the world at large, might seem trifling, as there are so many people, with ever so many food habits, determined by history, culture, memory, identity and taste, to name a few influences (Millstone and Lang 2008; FAO Newsroom 2006; Myer and Kent 2003; Holtzman 2003; Rozin 1998). This question, however, is not referring to a ‘world diet’: the same food for each and every person anywhere on the globe. It rather addresses the

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<sup>39</sup> The Kyoto protocol is an environmental treaty from the UN to counter climate change.

<sup>40</sup> For a while, beef consumption dropped worldwide in consequence of the mad cow disease aftermath – in the USA to 50 percent (Schlosser 2001, 274 vv.).

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issues of nutritional social justice and sustainable practice, in relation to how the rapidly increasing world population *as a whole* can feed itself without depleting the planet.

In *Diet for a Small Planet* Frances Moore Lappé tried to answer the question of how close we are to the limits of the capacity of the earth to provide food for all of humanity (Moore Lappé 1976 [1971]). In fact, Moore Lappé was the first person to calculate and suggest that adapting a meatless vegetarian<sup>41</sup> diet could be the solution for feeding an ever growing world population (Belasco 2007 [1989]: 54-59). Moore Lappé arrived at the conclusion that the problems concerning world famine were of a political economic nature - related to the asymmetric access to food and its distribution - rather than an agricultural one, as enough calories were being produced (Moore Lappé 1976 [1971]).

***Agriculture & commodification: a brief history***

In the 1930s, the coinciding of an international economic crisis and a national agricultural crisis caused by the environmental disasters of drought and severe wind erosion leading to dust storms in the Dust Bowl - the Southern and Central Great Plains in the USA - caused many farmers to go bankrupt and leave for the cities and farms in the Pacific West. These farmers had been encouraged by the Homestead Act<sup>42</sup> to acquire land under favorable conditions for growing cash crops – wheat in particular - which they could sell at a fixed price per bushel, a practice which some argue led to overproduction (Lang et al. 2009; Cunfer 2005).

Under President Roosevelt and the New Deal of 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration developed a comprehensive system of farm subsidies for commodity crops, intended to keep what farmers remained in the area, and to invite farmers that had left to come back (Cunfer 2005). The Dust Bowl ended in 1941 with the arrival of rain on the Southern and central plains and with the advent of World War II, as

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<sup>41</sup> But with fish, seafood, dairy and eggs.

<sup>42</sup> The Homestead Act was a piece of legislation passed by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. Under the Homestead Act, people could lay rightful claim to a fixed amount of acreage, if they had lived on it for five years while also farming it.

the war effort required more crops to feed Americans at home as well as the troops and Allies overseas – a great opportunity for the (prospective) farmers in the Great Plains.

These subsidies, created as an emergency Depression measure, became routine and are still in place 75 years later, permanently transforming the economics of agriculture - not only in the USA but worldwide, through the politics of free trade after World War II (Lang et al. 2009; Cunfer 2001). Before I will explore this link, it is necessary to make a detour to the Declaration of Human Rights, in order to understand how the commodification of agricultural produce, world famine, seed and free trade are tied into the current global food system that is predicted to produce 285.6 million tonnes of meat in 2009 (FAO 2009b, 7; 40).

### ***Food & the Universal Declaration of Human Rights***

In 1948, the Members of the United Nations declared that “... everyone has a right to be free from hunger and to adequate food including drinking water, as set out in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>43</sup>

According to the new Declaration of Human Rights, launched by the Cordoba process<sup>44</sup> at the end of 2008 - on the occasion of the Declaration’s 60th anniversary - the number of chronically hungry people worldwide was estimated to amount to 967 million people. This number has risen to 1012 million, according to FAO estimates in 2009, or roughly every 1 in 6 people (FAO 2009a; Millstone and Lang 2008).

World famine in the 1970s led the Declaration to introduce for the first time the concept of food security, being: “...*the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to*

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<sup>43</sup> Source: <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/the-cordoba-declaration/pdf> - retrieved 06/02/2009

<sup>44</sup> “The Cordoba process was started at an international seminar on the right to food at CEHAP, Cordoba October 2007, further pursued at the Right to Food Forum organized by the FAO Right to Food Unit in October 2008, and completed in its present version following a second meeting convened in Cordoba by CEHAP on November 28-29, 2008. It will be subject of further consultations and possible revisions during 2009.” Source retrieved 06/02/2009, <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/the-cordoba-declaration/pdf>

*offset fluctuations in production and prices.* “ (United Nations 1975, 6).

This definition of food security, which is basically a technical matter of providing adequate human nutrition, led to the assumption that *more food production*, would solve the problem of mass starvation. The ensuing Green Revolution, led to a spectacular increase in the amount of food produced, but the amount of chronically hunger did not diminish accordingly (FAO 1996a; 1996b; Pinstrip-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch 1997).

In his landmark book on poverty and famines, Amartya Sen (1981), concluded that enough food was being produced (i.e. enough calories per capita), but that in fact the *access* to food, the entitlement to it, was the core of the problem. The poor simply lacked the financial and political means to claim their share of the world food production. Sen made it clear that the world food problem was thus not so much a matter of food production, as it was one of social inequality and injustice. To see how a perfect storm has been in the making since the first Declaration of Human Rights, it is necessary to go back to the root of all food: seed.

### ***The (new) seed situation***

In and of themselves, “*Seeds are the very beginning of the food chain. He, who controls the seeds, controls the food supply and thus controls the people.*”<sup>45</sup> To understand why this is of utmost importance for current developments in the agro-industrial-bio-seed complex, it is necessary to have an understanding of how ‘normal’ agricultural practices and techniques have evolved over time, in stark contrast with contemporary corporate practice in the last few decades.

When people first settled down and started to grow crops for food, indigenous plant breeds were improved upon over time by cross pollination. Thus, plants were developed that were best suited for local circumstances and climate conditions (e.g. drought, wind, flooding, soil). Through the techniques of crop rotation, mixed crop planting and by using natural fertilizers (manure, compost), the soil was not too much

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<sup>45</sup> Dominique Guillet, *Association Kokopelli* - <http://www.schnews.org.uk/archive/news622.htm> - retrieved 08/02/2009.



depleted in order to recover and be (re)used.

Two of the most significant agricultural practices that ensued are that of brown bagging and seed exchanging. Brown bagging is the practice of seed saving, when the best seeds from the current harvest are kept, to sow them in the following year. Seed exchanging makes for the dissemination of new strands of plant DNA that have been obtained through cross breeding plants. Like this, the various genetic materials guarantee biodiversity, which is of the utmost importance in order to, e.g., withstand pests or insect attacks that may threaten a growing crop.

After World War II chemical companies diversified into producing petroleum-based seed fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. Next they branched out into the seed business and began to invest heavily in the research and development of ‘hybrid’ seeds<sup>46</sup> that would lay the foundation for the Green Revolution. At the same time, these companies began to buy up other seed companies, to consolidate their monopoly on the hybrid seed market (Kloppenburger 2004).

A short while later, their R & D departments would begin to focus on genetically modified (GM) seeds, for the use of which companies could charge money on the basis of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). How has the juridical jump from saving seed and exchanging them, to IPR on seeds been made possible?

In 1980, in *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*,<sup>47</sup> 447 U.S. 303, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that from now on, a patent over a living organism was extended to cover ‘a live *human-made micro-organism*’. In other words, whereas prior to this process, plants and animals themselves were subject to property rights and ownership, their genetics were not. After the process, however, the genetics of plants and animals could be owned and thus be subjected to intellectual property rights.

When farmers buy GM seeds, they do not ‘own’ them. In fact, farmers are ‘renting’ the GM seeds from the bio-tech corporations on an annual basis, as these seeds

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<sup>46</sup> Hybrid seeds are bred to improve the characteristics of the resulting plants, such as better yield, greater uniformity, improved color, disease resistance, and so forth. It cannot be saved, as the seed from the first generation of hybrid plants does not reliably produce true copies, therefore, new seed must be purchased for each planting. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrid\\_seed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrid_seed), accessed 21 December, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*, 447 U.S. 303 (1980), <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=447&invol=303> - retrieved 12/02/2009.

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fall under the plant variety provisions of the new patent law. It is thus, that farmers are losing their independence and become ‘extensions’ in the field for the bio-tech corporations the world over<sup>48</sup>, as IPR clauses in the contracts between the seed companies and the farmers forbid the farmers to save and replant company seeds, or exchange them. This development marked a shift from *public* agrarian practice in which seeds could be exchanged and saved freely, to *privately* owned seed DNA, subject to IPR, depriving farmers from what they claim as their inherent right as farmers.

Another consequence of the Supreme Court ruling, is the explosion of tactical co-operations, strategic mergers and take-overs among agro-chemical-bio-tech companies, resulting in consolidation of power in the hands of a few transnational corporations (TNCs) (Kloppenburger 2004; Kneen 2002).

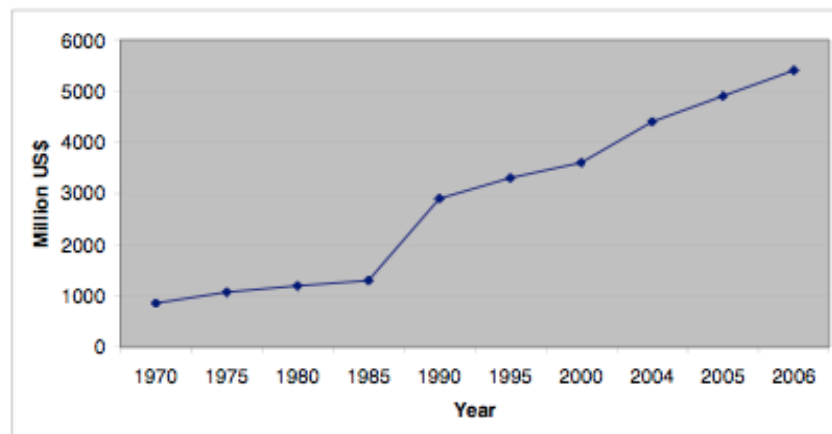


Figure 1. Growth in the International Seed Industry

Source: *International Seed Federation*<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For a brief history of the seed industry, see:

<http://seedstory.wordpress.com/a-brief-history-of-the-seed-industry/> - retrieved 06/02/2009

[http://www.worldseed.org/en-us/international\\_seed/evolution\\_seed\\_trade.html](http://www.worldseed.org/en-us/international_seed/evolution_seed_trade.html) - retrieved 06/02/2009

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.worldseed.org/en-us/international\\_seed/seed\\_statistics.html](http://www.worldseed.org/en-us/international_seed/seed_statistics.html) - retrieved 06/02/2009

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Based on a report published by the ETC Group, the action group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration:<sup>50</sup> *“From thousands of seed companies and public breeding institutions three decades ago, 10 companies now control more than two-thirds of global proprietary seed sales. From dozens of pesticide companies three decades ago, 10 now control almost 90% of agrochemical sales worldwide. From almost 1,000 biotech start-ups 15 years ago, 10 companies now account for three-quarters of industry revenues.”* (ETC 2008, 12).

The concentration of power makes for strong industry lobbies in governmental organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB), that are in favor of governmental deregulation and the promotion of free trade, including agricultural crops. How this directly affects the lives of people, in particular in the global South, will be dealt with next.

***Free trade & the Agreement on Agriculture***

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) came into being at the same time as the WTO – formerly GATT<sup>51</sup> – on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995. Free trade under GATT excluded trade in agricultural crops (Tansey and Worsley 1995). The AoA, effectively considering agricultural crops as commodities, is based on the three pillars for trade regulation: domestic support, market access and export subsidies.<sup>52</sup>

The first pillar, domestic support, is a set of rules that regulate under which circumstances local producers can be subsidized by their own governments. The second pillar, market access, is aimed at reducing the tariff on *imported* goods, in an attempt to *“create order, fair competition and a less distorted agricultural sector”*.<sup>53</sup> Non-tariff barriers on imports – such as import quotas or import restrictions – have to be

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<sup>50</sup> “Who owns nature?”, November 13, 2008. The ETC Group, an international advocacy organization based in Canada, has been monitoring corporate power in the industrial life sciences for the past 30 years, revealed this in a report in November 2008 that can be downloaded at: [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=706](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=706) - retrieved 06/02/2009.

<sup>51</sup> General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade, 1947. A tariff is a tax on goods upon *importation*

<sup>52</sup> WTO site, [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/agrm3\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/agrm3_e.htm) - retrieved 06/02/2009.

<sup>53</sup> WTO site, [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/agrm3\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/agrm3_e.htm) - retrieved 06/02/2009.

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‘tarifficated’ in order to become part of the global market process. Once bound to a tariff, the rate will be subsequently reduced over time. The third pillar, that concerns export subsidies, obliges *developed* countries to reduce the export subsidies given to local producers, in order to reduce false competition.

However, only developed countries are rich enough to sponsor their agricultural producers, one way or another (Millstone and Lang 2008, 70; UNDP 2005, 129 vv.). Thus, subsidized crops flood the global market at below-cost prices. This both undercuts and lowers farm gate prices for local producers in developing countries, as these countries cannot afford to support their domestic producers or pay them export subsidies. In practice this leads to what has become known as ‘export dumping’ (E.g. Patel 2007, Kneen 2002).

Once governments of developing countries take out a loan from the World Bank, or sign a WTO Trade agreement, subsistence farmers in those countries are effectively threatened by the conditions put forward by those loans and agreements, as loans and agreements come attached to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). In practice, SAPs are prescribed economic reform policies, such as stipulations to reduce government budgets and social spending; the cutting of programs and subsidies for basic goods; the elimination of restrictions on foreign ownership; to increase local interest rates; to shift from subsistence farming to export economies while eliminating import tariffs (Makwana 2005).

It seems that governmental deregulation as a result of free trade agreements: favors the agricultural transnational corporations in the developed countries over the smallholders in the developing countries (Patel 2007, Kneen 2002). Deregulation empowers TNC’s at the expense of sovereign, nation states - developing as well as developed - as well, prejudicating a country’s rights to self-governance and diversity (Atkins and Bowler 2001; Kneen 2002; Sachs and Santarius 2007; Patel 2007).

Moreover, due to the asymmetric economic power relations between developed and developing countries, in a bid to compete with export crops in a global market that is distorted by the agricultural subsidy policies of the developed countries, developing countries see the key source of their income slip away (Tansey and Worsley 1995; Patel

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2007; Millstone and Lang 2008). This in turn prevents the indebted countries from paying off their international loans, while at the same time they have to import food, because their agriculture has turned from food self-sufficiency to cash crop production. This process is a downward spiral towards more debts.

To illustrate the asymmetry, Sachs and Santarius (2007) use the analogy of the rules in playing golf: the weaker the player, the larger the handicap granted to the player, so different level players can compete on equal terms in the same field. No such ‘handicap’ is granted to developing countries in the context of trade negotiations.

Some examples of adjustments consist of the devaluation of currency and the encouragement of export; the reduction of public spending and privatization of state-owned companies; protectionism against transnational corporations (TNC’s) is reduced, while government subsidies on goods and services are reduced or abolished, leading to a significant increase in the price of staple foods (Atkins and Bowler 2001, 174; Millstone and Lang 2008, 74).

In general, the more people make their livelihood in the agricultural sector – which in most developing countries accounts for up to 70 percent of the population – the less appropriate it is to focus on export crops as a strategy to earn foreign currency in this sector (FAO 2005; Millstone and Lang 2008, 50; Altieri 2009).

The social and environmental consequences of ‘business as usual’, puts additional pressure on the land, as agricultural land is urbanized. These so-called ‘non-trade’ concerns,<sup>54</sup> can be witnessed in the growing number of slums around cities in the developing world.

Lately, farmers are fighting back. They have organized themselves in all kinds of organizations (e.g. *La Via Campesina*, MST)<sup>55</sup> whose aim is to resist further global appropriation of their lands and local economies (E.g. Kalb 2005). They campaign for agricultural reform and the human right to food - they demand food sovereignty for all.

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<sup>54</sup> Fourth Special Session of the Committee on Agriculture (2000),  
[http://commerce.nic.in/wto\\_sub/Agri/sub\\_g70.htm](http://commerce.nic.in/wto_sub/Agri/sub_g70.htm) .- retrieved 06/02/2009

<sup>55</sup> *La Via Campesina* meaning ‘the peasant’s way’, and MST, *Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra*, Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement are peasants movements that will be dealt with in the next section, about the global fight for food sovereignty.

***The global fight for local food sovereignty***

People facing hunger and malnutrition are, to a large extent, smallholders, landless workers, pastoralists and fisherfolk, often situated in marginal and vulnerable ecological environments. Neglected by (inter)national policies, they cannot compete with increasingly subsidized industrialized agriculture, both nationally and in the world market. Many farmers tried to catch the ‘Green Revolution’ train but became stuck in the debt trap of increasing input costs and decreasing product prices. Concentration in the food market chain is another worrying trend causing increasing dependence of both consumers and producers on a declining number of seed, inputs and food products conglomerates. (Vanruesel 2008).

Food sovereignty is a term originally coined in 1996 by the members of *La Via Campesina* as an alternative policy framework for agriculture. Its political goal is to counter the narrow view of food security as the concept of access to global food imports by food-deficient countries.

Emerging in 1993, *La Via Campesina* is: “an international movement of peasants, small- and medium sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers that fight for the right of people to determine their own local policy to food security through agrarian reform and rural development.”<sup>56</sup>

The acceptance of this framework<sup>57</sup> in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is extremely important, not only for the food producing smallholders involved, but also for the end consumer: the true right to food and the true right to produce food, mean that *all* people have an unalienable right to both safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food as well as to food-producing resources, while they have the ability to sustain themselves and their societies in the process<sup>58</sup>. If the ‘no-consensus’ on a G8 driven global partnership against hunger is the surprise outcome of the High Level

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.viacampesina.org> .- retrieved 06/02/2009.

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=27&Itemid=44](http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=27&Itemid=44) .- retrieved 06/02/2009.

<sup>58</sup> For Via Campesina’s seven principles of food sovereignty, see <http://www.familyfarmdefenders.org/pmwiki.php/FoodSovereignty/ViaCampesinasSevenPrinciplesOfFoodSovereignty> - retrieved 05/03/2009.

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Meeting on Food Security held in Madrid in January of 2009, it may well be an indication that the food sovereignty movement is conquering terrain. In the final declaration of the farmers and civil society organizations, they state that:

We see the proposed Global Partnership as just another move to give the big corporations and their foundations a formal place at the table, despite all the rhetoric about the 'inclusiveness' of this initiative. Furthermore it legitimates the participation of WTO, World Bank and IFM and other neoliberalism-promoting institutions in the solution of the very problems they have caused. This undermines any possibility for civil society or governments from the Global South to play any significant role. We do not need this Global Partnership or any other structure outside the UN system.<sup>59</sup>

After all, until a few decades ago, it was the small scale farmers of this world that sustained the world at large with their hard work in the field, as they produced more than half of the world's food supply (Altieri 2009).

Some numbers: approximately 1.5 billion people live in smallholder households, and 2.5 billion people in poor countries live directly from agriculture – farming crops and livestock - or rely on forestry or fisheries (Pimbert 2009, World Bank 2007). Moreover, worldwide, women form the substantial majority of the agricultural workforce and produce most of the food that is consumed locally (World Bank 2009; Millstone and Lang 2008, 50).

About 404 million farms – of an estimated 525 million farms worldwide – are small farms with two hectares of land or less (IAASTD 2008). These small farms produce the majority of the staple crops needed to feed the world's rural and urban populations (Altieri 2009).

Gisele Yasmeen, in *Food and Culture: A Reader* writes : “*I have proposed the term "foodscape" to emphasize the spatialization of foodways and the interconnections between people, food, and places. 'Foodscape', drawn from 'landscape' is a term used to describe a process of viewing place in which food is used as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations.*” (Yasmeen 2008, 525).

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<sup>59</sup> Final declaration of farmers and civil society organizations, <http://www.foodsovereignty.org> .- retrieved 06/02/2009.

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Interestingly enough, while foodscape refers to the connection through embeddedness between food, people and place, the term ‘placeless foodscape’ is used in academia to describe places where food systems are **not** grounded in the local culture, like the global food system. In the *Anthropology of Food* Roberta Sonnin writes:

The concept of embeddedness, borrowed from economic sociology, is widely used to characterize these two different types of food systems: at one end, there is the dis-embedded globalized food system, the ‘placeless foodscape’ (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000, 319) of countries such as the UK and the US; at the other end, there are the more embedded, localized food systems of countries such as France and Italy, where food products appear to be forever rooted in a particular place. (Sonnin 2007, 2)

The elements described so far – livestock, pollution, Declaration of Human Rights, poverty, seed, IPR, farm subsidies, free trade, AoA and food sovereignty – are but a few elements that make up the complexities of today’s global food system. But these particular elements are necessary to understand the ‘placeless foodscape’ that forms the background against which the *Jantar Popular* is situated.

### *The fog of food*

The Green Revolution came at the expense of the environment, as its hybrid seeds depended heavily on fossil fuel, whether for input (fertilizer, herbicide, pesticide) or output (transportation of the harvest to processing site), and water (Kloppenburger 2004). It also led to enormous, subsidized crop surpluses - to the grain mountains that were to be fed to animals from the 1970s onward, encouraged by recommendations by the FAO<sup>60</sup> (Dendy and Dobraszczyk 2000). Feeding coarse grains to livestock reduces their time of growing till slaughter weight, and facilitates off-field production in so called Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), the part and parcel of factory farming.

Eating animal feed, livestock need less time to reach slaughter weight, making it

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<sup>60</sup> The same thing had happened in the 1920s when Europe became food self-sufficient again and the surpluses produced in the USA were used to feed cattle (Dendy and Dobraszczyk 2000).



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cheaper for the producer to grow livestock. Thus, the offer of meat increases, which puts downward pressure on the price of meat. This in turn stimulates consumer demand (Rivera-Ferre 2008) for meat – as opposed to the supply side model offered by Delgado et al. (1999a & 1999b). The increased consumer demand, induced by lower prices for meat increases the demand for fodder to feed livestock, which, in turn, increases the price of grain, making the growing of fodder more attractive than growing crops for human consumption. Though the use of GM crops is still not deemed admissible for direct human consumption in the EU, livestock is allowed to eat it, thus opening an enormous potential for the GM producing seed corporations to market their products.

It does not seem likely that changes in the global food system will come from the production side that claims it is accommodating the growing demand for food (Delgado 1999b). This view is challenged by Rothstein (2005), who, like Rivera-Ferre (2008) claims that the increase in consumer demand has to do with changes in the global production chain. *“(...) the increasing importance of consumption throughout the world can be linked to changes in production which, rather than reducing the importance of production as the engine of the global economy, reflect the increased importance of capitalist production throughout the world.”* (Rothstein 2005, 279). Thus, change can come through *less* consumer demand for meat.

Despite the enormous growth in demand from the developing world – from China (and Brazil) in particular – the per capita meat consumption in the developing countries is still considerably less than the average per capita consumption of meat in the developed world (Speedy 2003), while the growth in world population is expected to stabilize at around 10-11 billion people (McMichael and Powles 1999). The great technological progress in the last fifty years has not led to major reductions in poverty and hunger in poor countries (UNCTAD/UNDEP 2008).

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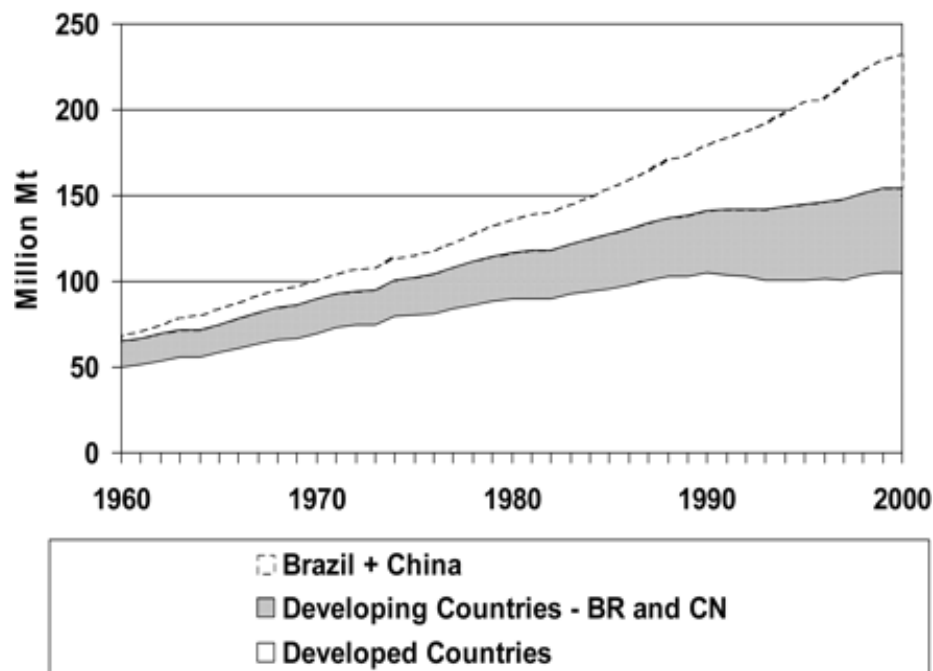


Figure 2. Global demand for meat in metric tonnes.

Source: Speedy (2003) in the Journal of Nutrition.

The idea that one's choice of food is an act of personal freedom, is exactly the kind of thinking that has been made possible in a climate where:

(...)global advertising [is] the key technology for the world-wide dissemination of a plethora of creative, and culturally well-chosen ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where he or she is at best a chooser. (Appadurai 1990).

Knowingly or not, through every bite that people ingest, they are linked to some part of the global food system somewhere (Patel 2007; Pollan 2006).

George Orwell in *Road to Wigan Pier* wrote that he thought that: "... it could be plausibly argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion." (1937, Chapter 6). It is in this spirit that GAIA through the *Jantar Popular*

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hopes to create awareness among a larger public about the politics of food – how one's personal choice in food, has a political dimension as well: nothing comes out of thin air.

Neither does the *Jantar Popular*, which brings us to how it is done.

### Chapter 3. BEHIND THE SCENES & DINNERTIME

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

-- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Food is like a mandala with ever new levels of complexity, of connecting with other realms such as the local, the personal, the environment or the global. People producing food are in the middle of it all, making nature edible. Food is central to the path of life. Food is sacred, as you are what you eat – food sustains you. Eating with other people through communion and sharing, brings you closer to the other people.

--Ariana, during interview

#### *Genesis of an ideal*

Before the food gets to the serving table every Thursday of the year – except in August – a lot of preparation is required that is not visible to the JP public. As I participated in every stage of the process for nearly four months, I will use both my own experience and that of informants to describe each stage. But before I proceed to do so, I want to describe how the JP came into being in the first place, as remembered by the two consecutive coordinators who were involved in its genesis.

According to Bruno, it was S., a German girl, who, for a few months in 2008, organized an informal *Volkskueche* every other week. Some 20 people would show up and eat together. Bruno studied first design, then painting at the Faculdade de Belas Artes (FBA) of the Universidade de Lisboa (UL), from 1998–2005. During 2003, he completed two semesters to Granada on an Erasmus exchange.<sup>61</sup> In 2006/7, he volunteered with a local NGO in Buenos Aires, Argentina, through the European Voluntary Service programme (EVS). Upon his return, he went to *Ecotopia 2007*<sup>62</sup> held in Aljezur, Portugal

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<sup>61</sup> The Erasmus Program is a European Union student exchange program established in 1987. It is the operational framework for the European Commission's initiatives in higher education.

<sup>62</sup> “*Ecotopia is an annual 2 week-long meeting of activist individuals and groups, focusing on issues of environment and social justice. It has been organized by EYFA (European Youth For Action) since 1989, and is hosted by local grassroots environmental organizations. Ecotopia is a horizontally organized space to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, share skills in workshops or discussions, exchange experiences and ideas,*

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that year. There, he came in contact with GAIA-Alentejo's project *Centro de Convergência*, after which he began to collaborate with GAIA-Lisbon, that had just sublet space in the GDM. In March 2008 he started a nine months 'professional internship' sponsored by the IEPF at GAIA.

My internship at GAIA was as a coordinator of the Social Center Project. I started coordinating dinners at the same time dinners were starting to happen – it became part of my function there. The coordination is more about keeping the activities going and keeping people actively involved, than about taking decisions by oneself. When GAIA chose to have internships, it was because of the need to have full-time presence that would guarantee the regularity of the activities, as there were few volunteers working in the project at the time.(Bruno, 24/04/09)

Bruno was succeeded by Inês, who started as a paid coordinator in January 2009. In 2000, she went to the FBA-UL to study Communication Design, where by 2001, she and fellow vegetarian students managed to get a vegetarian option in the canteen menu. In 2005 during the *Vida Verde Vegan Summer Camp*,<sup>63</sup> she participated in a 24 hour 'cooking spree' - cooking for 24 consecutive hours - discovering a passion for cooking for groups. Like Bruno, she had gone to *Ecotopia 2007*, where she had volunteered as a cook and had met representatives of GAIA. Galvanized by these meetings she decided to join GAIA.

For Inês, the inspiration for the JP was a book, 'The Good Life'. She could not remember the names of the authors, but she read it while she was travelling in the USA. In her

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*network with new groups, and spread information on social, political and environmental actions. Ecotopia usually hosts a few hundred people, addressing topics such as racism, xenophobia, homo-and queerphobia, creative dissent, alternative media, social centers, sustainable building and infrastructure, organic/fair trade food and farming, climate change, diversity, GMOs, etc. During the two weeks, the community utilizes methods of low-impact living; from a vegan kitchen, use of alternative power and ecological cleaning products (washing liquid, soaps, toothpaste), to organizing events to benefit the locality (cleaning actions etc.)*" Source: <http://ecotopiagathering.org/> - retrieved 21/08/2009.

<sup>63</sup> "*Vida Verde é um Encontro exclusivamente dedicado à partilha de práticas ecológicas, em que uma das finalidades é informar, sensibilizar e proporcionar a todos os participantes os conhecimentos e a sabedoria para viver uma vida mais Simples, Natural e Sustentável, que esteja em harmonia com a Natureza e com as pessoas.*"

Source: <http://vidaverde.eco-gaia.net/> - retrieved 21/08/2009.

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memory, the book was: “... *about Nineteenth Century kids who were looking for what it means to have a good life. They arrived at the conclusion that food is the center of the purpose of life. They left the city to go and live in the country side in a home they built from scratch.*” (Inês, 17/02/09)

Intrigued, I started looking for the authors. Googling ‘the good life’ yielded 3.140.000.000 results<sup>64</sup>, from Kane West, to a 1975 American sitcom, to Aristotle, to Cicero. But before long, I traced the book to Helen (1904–1993) and Scott Nearing (1883–1983), who were so-called ‘back-to-the-landers’, long before this became fashionable in 1960s and 70s USA counterculture (Belasco 2007 [1989]). The Nearings were nowhere near ‘Nineteenth Century kids’. They were a couple of academics that left the city – i.e. New York in 1932, to live on a farm. They were first homesteading<sup>65</sup> in Vermont, later in Maine – in search of ‘the good life’ in the middle of the Great Depression. They wrote extensively about their experiences as homesteaders. Inspired by Thoreau’s *Walden*, the Nearings proclaimed a sustainable lifestyle through simple, frugal and purposeful living, in which simple (vegetarian) food played a lead role.<sup>66</sup> Through organic horticulture, they managed to become eighty percent self-sufficient in their food needs and they built their own house.

For many people in 1960s USA, and to a lesser extend in Europe, a simple life on the land, in touch with nature and through nature in touch with oneself, as described by Thoreau – whom Frederick Turner calls ‘the anthropologist of experience’ (Turner and Bruner 1986, 73) – in *Walden*, seemed an attractive alternative to living a complicated life in the alienating city. *Walden* became one of the handbooks<sup>67</sup> of counterculture for people who were not very pleased with the post-war, materialistic turn life in American (European) industrial society had taken. The term ‘counter culture’ is attributed to Theodore Roszak, who wrote the first book on the phenomenon in 1968<sup>68</sup> in which he

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<sup>64</sup> Accessed 21/08/2009. When I googled ‘the good life’ on 31/12/2009, 3,660,000 results were found.

<sup>65</sup> Homesteaders are those people who go back to the land and choose to live a sustainable, self-sufficient lifestyle.

<sup>66</sup> Source: <http://www.goodlife.org>. Of all the people interviewed, Inês was the only one to mention ‘the good life’.

<sup>67</sup> For an extensive counterculture reading list, see:

[http://www.well.com/~mareev/TIMELINE/counterculture\\_reading.html](http://www.well.com/~mareev/TIMELINE/counterculture_reading.html) - retrieved 06/02/2009.

<sup>68</sup> Roszak, Theodore. 1968. *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*.

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observes that: “*Throughout the West (as well as in Japan and Latin America) it is the young who find themselves cast as the only effective radical opposition within their societies. Not all the young, of course: perhaps only a minority of the university campus population.*” (1995, 2).

In *Appetite for Change*, Warren Belasco (2007 [1989]) describes how the counterculture, through opposition to the processed food manufactured by the food industry, developed a ‘countercuisine’. According to Belasco:

(...) being different in something so basic and taboo-laden as food might lead to being different in many things. This, not generational rebellion, was the implicit agenda of the countercuisine: food was a medium for broader change. (...) Unlike sporadic anti-war protests, dietary rightness could be lived 365 days a year, three times a day. The New Left had always insisted that the personal was political. What could be more personal than food? And what could be more political than challenging agribusiness, America’s largest and most environmentally troublesome industry, with \$350 billion in assets (1969), employing 23 million workers and 3 million farmers, selling \$100 billion worth of food to 200 million consumers? (2007, 28)

The counterculture through its ensuing countercuisine advocated natural, organically grown foods, and whole grains in particular, as an antidote to the ‘synthetic’ food produced by the food industry. If it was home-grown, so much the better. (Belasco 2007)

The same ideals of the 1960s counterculture, underlie ecological youth events such as the aforementioned *Ecotopia* and *de Via Verde*. Both events are about the exchange of knowledge and hands-on practice of how to live a more sustainable life, through ‘low-impact living’. The same ideals can be traced to the *Jantar Popular*.

According to Inês, the first *Jantar Popular* was informally organized in November 2007 as a farewell dinner for a former GAIA worker who was leaving the country. Between 20 and 30 people showed up. The whole event was improvised. Food was bought at *Biocoop*, an organic food collective located in a wooden shed across the road from the old military airport near Lisbon airport. To cook, they had to borrow pans from the *Centro Em Movimento*. Though they considered the dinner a ‘one-off’, they also

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felt it was a wonderful experience at the same time. Thus, an idea was born: why not try to do this more often?

After substantial works on the kitchen and an investment in three, large pressure cookers, the next dinner took place on a Thursday in March 2008. GAIA thought fifteen people would show up, but some forty people came, of which thirty paid €2,00. The group thought this was amazing and the JP as a *weekly* feature became a reality.

In 2008, the attendance increased gradually, from thirty to forty to fifty to sixty people per dinner. From February 2009 onwards, growth has been steep, with a spike of one hundred eighty people in March. On average, attendance has hovered between 120 and 150 people per night.

***How is it done?***

Before the food gets to the serving table, it first needs to be cooked. For it to be cooked, the ingredients need to be collected. To know what ingredients to collect, the quantities need to be calculated. To calculate the quantities, the menu needs to be established and a shopping list made accordingly. After the shopping, which requires volunteers, the foods that need soaking, such as rice and beans, are left in water overnight. The next day, the volunteer-chef (VC) and the other volunteers gather between 16.00 and 16.30 in the kitchen and start washing, chopping, frying and boiling. The VC must make sure other volunteers arrange the tables and chairs in the dining space, and set up the dish washing basins and its paraphernalia, ensuring that both the kitchen and the spaces are left behind impeccably clean at the end of the evening.

Roughly, the organization of a JP can be divided into 3 stages:

1. During the week: planning the menu, estimating the amount of people that might come and calculating the quantities accordingly and making a shopping list;
2. The day before: purchasing food items, and upon return put to soak ingredients that require prior soaking, such as brown rice and beans;
3. The day itself: start cooking and get the food ready around 20.30, setting up the space and cleaning – both the kitchen and the serving space.



### ***Stage 1. Planning***

Planning and preparing a meal for many people, closely resembles a military operation, including the decision-making (what to eat, how much to buy and who is buying) and establishing a kitchen hierarchy (who will be appointed the chef of the day, who will do what).<sup>69</sup> Although the JP is fully dependent on volunteers for its organization, preparation, setting up, distribution and cleaning, somebody needs to take the initiative, or nothing will happen.

During the 15 weeks that I was a participant-observer, Inês usually developed the menu,<sup>70</sup> calculated the quantities and made the shopping list. She also did the grocery shopping, usually with Pedro, her boyfriend and fellow GAIA member, and one or another volunteer. Inês expressed a wish that ideally all the ingredients for the JP should be bought in *mercearias* (small, family supermarkets) in the Mouraria. But there the food comes from conventional agriculture, which makes it difficult to know whether it is GMO, fossil fuel-based fertilizer and pesticide free, the criteria for choosing food for the JP. However, sometimes lemons, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and lettuce were bought in a neighborhood *mercearia*.

Volunteers can inscribe themselves via email or put themselves on a list with their name, email and what task they would like to perform. The menu planner has to make sure that there are enough volunteers to help, and actively engage people, when the list is short.

### ***Stage 2. Shopping and prep work***

The bulk of the food is bought in *Miosótis* near Campo Pequeno, an organic food store run by the former manager of the *Biocoop* organic food cooperative in Figo Maduro in front of the military airport in Lisbon. I went shopping twice: once for a *Jantar Popular* on March 12 with Inês, and again on April 29 with Pedro, for the JP, that coincided with Inês' birthday, 30 April and my last day as a participant observer. Both times I noticed that the vegetables were very fresh and in season, but not always local. One thing that

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<sup>69</sup> The traditional kitchen hierarchy as established by Escoffier was based on military structures.

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix V for the the menus while I was there.

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puzzled me was that the brown rice used for the JP came from Italy. Organic bread is quite expensive and thus not an integral part of a JP menu. Sometimes, bread or vegetables that have reached or are near their expiration date, are offered by *Miosótis* to the JP.

To give an idea of a shopping list, anticipating 150 to 160 people for the JP of March 12<sup>71</sup>, we bought:

- 9 kg beans (a mixture of chick peas, red kidney -, white - mung -, pinto -, black -, azuki beans, chicheros and lentils)
- 6 kg Hokaido pumpkin
- 5 kg red cabbage
- 3 kg red onions
- garlic
- 1 kg grapes
- 25 kg bag of brown rice, of which we used 8.5 kg,
- 2 bottles of *Risca Grande* olive oil (voted the best organic olive oil of Portugal) at *Miosótis*;
- 1 kg lemons,
- 5 kg carrots,
- 3 kg tomatoes and bunches of fresh parsley and coriander, locally at the corner shop.

Luckily we had some athletes from the *Grupo Desportivo* to help us carry up the food, as the kitchen is on the third floor. We put the assorted beans, the pulses and the rice to soak.

Another – occasional – source of food comes from the *horta popular*, though January through April are slow months for horticultural produce. Nevertheless, in the beginning of my fieldwork, it happened a few times that there were white cabbages and carrots from the *horta*. Those would be pounded and pressed with salt and water in order to ferment, a

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<sup>71</sup> In the end, around 180 people ate.

cooking technique often used in macrobiotic cooking.<sup>72</sup> All the while there were borage flowers to enliven the dishes with their bright blue color.

When I asked Inês why the JP did not have some kind of contract with one of the organic farms like *Urze* in Alcochete that offers subscriptions for weekly vegetable and fruit baskets delivered at the door step, she answered that they had not found one yet.

### *Stage 3a. Preparing the food*

And then it is Thursday. The kitchen is not very big, about 3 by 3.5 meter. At the entrance to the right stands a refrigerator, with an adjacent kitchen counter that runs along the wall, to end in a triangular sink in the right corner that has only cold running water. On top of the fridge is a radio that is always on. Over the counter a shelf provides storage for the pressure cookers and the additional pans. The plastic tubs for salads are stored on a shelf next to the fridge.

To the left of the sink is a gas stove with an oven that is barely used. Next to the stove are a single and a double professional gas cooker - on bottled gas - for institutional-sized pans. As the gas comes from bottles, it is important to make sure there is enough gas to complete the cooking. Matches or a lighter to light the fire are also essential.

Along the left wall is a tall cupboard which houses the plates, cutlery, bowls and trays that are used to serve the food. Next to it, a spice cabinet hangs over a flat surface for chopping. The rice is kept under the counter, as is the olive oil and the plastic containers for fermenting vegetables or making sangria for parties. There are usually one or two buckets for organic waste that will end up in the *horta's* compost bin. There are also recycling bins for plastic and metal, glass and paper.

The first thing to do is to add more water and then start the fire underneath the pressure cookers, as there is always some food that needs cooking before it can be turned into a dish. The rest of the chores are divided among the volunteers present. Often each

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<sup>72</sup> Inês took macrobiotic cooking classes with Mestre Kikuchi at his *Escola de Nutrição Mussa* in Mairiporã, some 70 km from Sao Paulo, Brasil.

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volunteer washes and chops one set of vegetables/fruits/herbs. The VC usually does the salting and spicing of the dishes. The others taste and give their opinion.



Picture 2. Food line-up, 30/04/2009

***Stage 3b. Preparing the space***

Every week, GAIA sends an itinerary to the JP mailing list, stating the menu, the topic of discussion and a summary of what the JP is about. Everybody can make suggestions for the topic to be discussed.

Around 18.00 hrs, some volunteers prepare the space where the dinner is to be served. There are three locations for this: in the *Salão Nobre*, in the *Sala dos Reis* and the outdoor terrace and occasionally outdoors at the concrete courtyard of the *campo da bola* where soccer practice and the rehearsals for the *marchas* take place.

Preparing the space entails setting up the serving table, distributing tables and chairs from stacks in the *Salão Nobre* and the *Sala dos Reis*, cleaning the table tops and setting up chairs in the *Sala dos Reis* for the activist's program – usually a film or

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documentary projection or a PowerPoint presentation. In the beginning those were planned after eating, but from mid March on, events took place before eating.

As everybody is expected to wash his or her own dishes and cutlery at the dishwashing table, what remains to be cleaned at the end of the evening are the serving pans and utensils as well as the kitchen space. In the dining areas all the chairs and tables must be cleaned and put back into stacks alongside the walls.

As time went by, it became clear that it were usually the same people who did the cooking and the same people who did the cleaning up.

### ***Public***

Although anybody can join in a *Jantar Popular*, it is probably safe to say that at least half the people at a JP are Erasmus exchange students. Erasmus students come from all over Europe, are usually between 21 and 27 years of age and spend one to two semesters in Lisbon. As the *Jantar Popular* is on the ‘things-to-do’ list of the Erasmus local chapter, every student that joined the chapter has access to information about the JP. At least five GAIA people expressed second thoughts on the dominant presence of an ever-changing legion of Erasmus students. These students tended to take the event less seriously. Though not directly connected with the environmental agenda, they add to the ‘buzz’ and are part of the event’s energy. The nationalities I encountered most were: German, Spanish, Italian and French, and the odd Scandinavian.

The rest of the people are what I would like to call ‘friends of GAIA’: people who were or are members of GAIA; people who have had a partnership with GAIA, like the *massa crítica*,<sup>73</sup> or people who are (considering) teaming up with GAIA, like the *C-days*.<sup>74</sup>

The ‘curious people’ are those who have heard about GAIA and want to learn more about the organization, or those who are curious to experience eating vegan food.

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<sup>73</sup> Critical Mass is a monthly celebration in over 300 cities worldwide that brings attention to alternative forms of transportation. By taking to the streets in a mass of bicycle riders, the riders hope to remind people that bikes are an efficient means of transport, and that bikers deserve a place on the roads.

<sup>74</sup> The C in C-days as in community – communication cooperation-days, where people share knowledge about a certain topic with others.

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How to describe the non-Erasmus people? Their ages are more diverse, from parents and their young or teenage children to Portuguese students. From ‘thirty- and forty somethings’ to people in their fifties, and even some retired people. Interestingly enough, many of the over thirty age bracket are foreigners – long-time residents in Lisbon, who might have been alternative or even hippies back in the day. In general, I think that the eaters as a whole are quite a cosmopolitan group, people with tertiary education and qualifications coming from an urban middle class background.

In his article in *Food and the City in Europe since 1800* (2007, 215 vv.), Alain Drouard remarks on reforming diets in, e.g. Germany, at the end of the Nineteenth Century, that:

In reaction to the traditional diet as well as the food industry, several initiatives, theoretical and practical, came into existence for the promotion of alternative forms of diet in German cities between 1880 and 1930. (...) The advocates of natural methods and reform were neither marginal nor sectarian. They were recruited in Germany among the urban middle class, i.e. among people with high levels of education and qualifications. (2007: 220)

(...)

Finally, vegetarianism appeared as a global project of reforming conditions of existence, based on the quest for a ‘natural’ way of life unfolding not only in a diet but also in health and medicine. As for naturism, it seemed to crystallize the anguish of declining, falling, parting from original harmony, generated by the speed of progress, urbanization and industrialization. (...) Blaming the industrialization of agriculture and its harmful effects, the diet reformers anticipated the concerns of modern diet and ecology. (2007: 224)

Reformists in the Nineteenth Century usually came from a middle-class background. This is still the case today when it comes to activists. According to Anthony Giddens, new social movement (NSM) activists come from: “(...) *the ‘new’ middle class that works in the post-1945 welfare state bureaucracies, creative fields and artistic fields (**including many students**)*. This finding led some to describe NSM as a form of ‘middle-class radicalism’ (Cotgrove and Dove 1980).” (Giddens 2009, 1018; bold by YIG). The

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tradition of social activism coming from within the middle classes is reflected within GAIA and the JP - without exception everybody I have interviewed has been or still goes to university and all of them were born in an urban environment.

People from the neighborhood do not eat at the JP, except Sr. Gomes from the bar and the lady from the gym on the ground floor. My informants attribute this to being unfamiliar with each other's lifestyles. The ever changing 'cast' of GAIA members present in the palace, may also complicate the familiarization process, as the neighbors and members of the *Grupo Desportivo* are always the same

I chose my informants from people who were either actively involved in the preparation of the *Jantar Popular*, who were active in other GAIA projects, but helping out in the non-cooking part of the JP, or who frequented the JP. GAIA and its environmental activism acts like a filter that attracts like-minded people.<sup>75</sup> Two of the things each and every informant has in common is the fact that they have done at least part of their studies abroad and that somehow food plays an important role in their lives. Being abroad exposed them to realities different from that in Portugal, or in Julian's case, different from the USA where he was born and raised though his father is Portuguese.<sup>76</sup>

I asked him how he had discovered GAIA, as he is not frequenting Erasmus or other exchange student's circles, and GAIA does not advertise the JP. Julian answered that he was looking for "*something social, something radical to do with food*". He heard about GAIA during his Portuguese language course but did not follow up the lead and check out the JP because he found "*the 'hood rather intimidating.*" When Julian finally overcame his resistance and braved the neighborhood, he felt he had arrived: "*I thought the people looked interesting. I also found them, the people, attractive and beautiful, both mentally and physically.*"

Though cooking is not his passion, he volunteers with the *Hare Krishna* on Mondays as well<sup>77</sup>. The food is prepared in their kitchen in the Rua de Estefania, while the food is

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<sup>75</sup> I tried to interview Sr. Gomes and the director of the GDM, but both have cancelled meetings on every occasion, which suggests that they felt uncomfortable refusing to be interviewed by me.

<sup>76</sup> Julian was born in Boston, Massachusetts, USA in 1988. His father was born in Guinea-Bissau.

<sup>77</sup> For a monography on *Hare Krishna* in Lisbon, see: Araújo 2006.

served in front of Santa Apolonia station, from 18.30 onwards. Julian has come to the conclusion that food groups are the best way to tackle a new social environment:

Food groups are the most generic, radically-oriented groups of people. So I always end up searching them out when I get to a new place. I moved a lot around after I left home and had to make new friends all the time. Looking for people I can relate to, I search out food groups because generally they exist more often than other kinds of radical groups. By radical I mean socially radical, outside of conventional politics. (Julian, 17/04/2009)

### ***Pre- & dinnertime***

It is Thursday, 19.30. While in the kitchen the volunteers are in the final stages of preparing the meal of the evening, the *Sala dos Reis* is the stage for the pre-dinner activities. Usually, the activities take the form of a film or documentary projection. After that the issues are discussed by the public and the person who proposed the subject. Sometimes a specialist is invited to share knowledge and experience with the audience. The audience is expected to participate actively in the debate.

Whatever the subject, from permaculture<sup>78</sup>, to guerrilla gardening, from suburbs to peak oil<sup>79</sup>, or from the ‘one straw revolution’<sup>80</sup> to the future of food, all topics follow a common thread: that humanity in the developed world should consume less and live more sustainably, that there are no additional planets to help sustain humanity as a whole at the consumption level of the developed world. But what happens in the *Sala dos Reis* is only a warming up for when the food starts to get served, between 20.30 and 21.00.

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<sup>78</sup> Permaculture is an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems that mimic the relationships found in natural ecologies to become self-sufficient. Permaculture is one of the subjects taught during *Via Verde* and *Ecotopia*.

<sup>79</sup> Peak oil refers to the point at which oil production goes into decline, placing significant upward pressure on oil and therefore food prices. See also Pfeiffer 2006, Green 1978.

<sup>80</sup> One straw farming is also known as natural farming, Developed 30 years ago by Masanobu Fukuoka of Japan. This method includes the use of crop rotation, minimal irrigation, little or no tillage, seed balls, and the natural regulation of pests. *The One-Straw Revolution* (1978) is one of the bibles for alternative farming.



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**Picture 3. In the *Sala dos Reis*.**

After the program in the *Sala dos Reis*, people will line up for the food. They can read the menu on a handwritten blackboard that also gives an estimate of how much of the food is organic. They pick up a plate and cutlery, pay €3,00 and get served. While waiting in the queue, apart from reading the information board as described in Chapter 1, people can browse and buy libertarian literature on the table adjacent to the serving table.

A table with books, zines and pamphlets on anarchism and animal welfare and -rights next to the food serving table is no coincidence. When eating at the *Jantar Popular*, eaters consume both food for subsistence, *and* food for thought, the symbolism is hard to miss.

The literature table is manned by P., from the *centro cultura libertária*<sup>81</sup>, the ‘libertarian cultural center’ – an anarchist<sup>82</sup> center in Cacilhas, Almada, since 1974. P. often participated in the kitchen and with setting up the spaces.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See: <http://culturalibertaria.blogspot.com/2009/11/ccl-centro-de-cultura-libertaria.html> - retrieved 09/09/2010.

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After people collect their food, they look for a place to eat. Sitting down or standing up, the talking and drinking is animated. It usually feels like there is a party in progress because of a ‘buzz’ in the air, a certain excited energy.

This is what I have observed and participated in for weeks, wondering what more there is to the JP than meets the eye. That the JP is not ‘just’ a shared meal with some political activism oriented entertainment was clear to me from day one.

But what *was* going on here?



Picture 4. Menu board.



Picture 5. Literature table and food serving

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It is one of the other radical groups mentioned in the articles of the DN. (2009) I bought there a hand-made calendar last year.

<sup>82</sup> Alain Drouard cites Ouédraogo, (1998, 74), “put it: ‘Between 1917 and at least 1930, anarchists were among the most well-known supporters of Cartonism. They then linked that Cartonian naturist diet with their demands of natural treatments, pacifism, etc, and made it an integral part of their gospel for a healthy social regeneration’.” (Drouard 2007, 217, footnote 7.)

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly enough, I never managed to get P. to sit down for an interview.

## Chapter 4. IN THE TEMPORARY VEGAN ZONE

The Bonnot gang were vegetarians and drank only water. They came to a bad (tho' picturesque) end. Vegetables and water, in themselves excellent things--pure zen really--shouldn't be consumed as martyrdom but as an epiphany.

-- Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. - Temporary Autonomous Zone*<sup>84</sup>

The Jantar Popular is a perfect way to see politics, love and service in action.

-- Inês, during cooking

Before theorizing about the nature of what is going on during the JP, it is necessary to first have a closer look at what 'commensality' and 'activism' entail. In the next section I will concentrate on what the concept of commensality – literally meaning: eating with others around a table – implied at different moments in time and place and what it means for the informants. I then explore environmental activism in the Twenty-first Century in theory and in practice as it relates to the *Jantar Popular*. I will analyze the JP through the concept of temporary autonomous zones (TAZs) and develop the relationship between commensality, activism and the TAZ. I conclude this chapter with some afterthoughts.

### *Commensality as a social interface*

In *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), Jack Goody points out that early anthropological research on food “*examined the links between the offering of food to supernatural agencies and other aspects of social organization*” (1982, 11), evoking *The Religion of the Semites* (Smith 1997 [1889]) as one of the earliest studies on how commensalism - the sharing of food around a table - has a beneficial influence on both establishing and maintaining social relationships among people. Robertson Smith observed in Lecture VII, that: “(...) *the act of eating and drinking together is the solemn and stated expression of the fact that all those who share the meal are brethern, and that all the duties of*

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<sup>84</sup> It is an incredible coincidence that as of 21 April 2009, the FBI has put a ‘strictly vegan’ American animal rights activist - on the America’s most wanted list, alongside the likes of Osama Bin Laden, virtually implicating a direct link between veganism and terrorism.  
[http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/terrorists/tersandiego\\_da.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/terrorists/tersandiego_da.htm) - retrieved 17/05/2009

*friendship and brotherhood are implicitly acknowledged in their common act.*" (1997 [1889], 247; Goody 1982, 12).

In early Christianity, women were mainly absent from the dinner table (Bellan-Boyer 2003). When commensality was, in fact, only open to a certain group of men, it is perhaps easy to understand why the open, communal meals as encouraged and practiced by Jesus, as described in *The Gospel of Thomas*<sup>85</sup>, were considered a scandal in the social context at the time:

If one actually brought in anyone off the street, one could, in such a situation, have classes, sexes, and ranks all mixed up together. Anyone could be reclining next to anyone else, female next to male, free next to slave, socially high next to socially low, and ritually pure next to ritually impure. And a short detour through the cross-cultural anthropology of food and eating underlines what a societal nightmare that would be. . . . not just of eating together, of simple table fellowship, but what anthropologists call 'commensality' – from 'mensa', the Latin word for 'table'. It means the rules of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization. It means table fellowship as a map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation.

What Jesus' parable advocates, therefore, is an open commensality, an eating together without using table as a miniature map of society's vertical discriminations and lateral separations. The social challenge of such equal and egalitarian commensality is the parable's most fundamental danger and most radical threat. It is only a story, of course,

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<sup>85</sup> "Jesus said: A man had guests; and when he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servants to invite the guests. He went to the first, and said to him: My master invites you. He said: I have money with some merchants; they are coming to me this evening. I will go and give them my orders. I ask to be excused from the dinner. He went to another (and) said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: I have bought a house, and I am asked for a day. I shall not have time. He went to another (and) said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: My friend is about to be married, and I am to arrange the dinner. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused from dinner. He went to another, he said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: I have bought a farm; I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused. The servant came back (and) said to his master: Those whom you have invited to dinner have asked to be excused. The master said to his servant: **Go out to the roads, bring those whom you find, that they may dine.** Traders and merchants [shall] not [enter] the places of my Father." (Bold by YIG) Source: <http://www.moderngnosis.org/gnostic-texts/gospel-of-thomas/gospel-of-thomas-saying-64> - retrieved 20/01/2010

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but it is one that focuses its egalitarian challenge on society's miniature mirror, the table, as the place where bodies meet to eat. (Crossan 1994, 74vv.).

In *The Sociology of the Meal*, Georg Simmel observed that everybody has a physiological need to eat and drink. Unlike the sharing of e.g. thoughts, Simmel writes in the essay: “(...) *what a single individual eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another. (...) The sociological structure of the meal emerges, which links precisely the exclusive selfishness of eating with a frequency of being together, with a habit of being gathered such as is seldom attainable on occasions of a higher intellectual order.*” (Simmel 1997, 130).

In other words, the commensal intake of food forms a bridge between the sphere of the selfish individual and the social collective.

In ‘Melding the Public and Private Spheres: Taking Commensality Seriously’ (1996), Albert Hirschman analyzes the evolution of the Greek banquet in ancient times and “(...) *feels tempted to suggest that a direct link exists between the banquet and the emergence of Athenian democracy, that towering political invention of the Greeks. (...) It would seem that Simmel was right: if Athenian democracy was one of its externalities or side effects, the sociological-political significance of the meal or banquet was truly immense.*” (Hirschman 1996, 543, 545).

Hirschman concludes that from a purely biological point of view, eating is the self-centered and private activity of satiation – the physiological process during a meal to (eventually) stop eating when feeling satisfied. But when the eating is done in common, it goes together with many and diverse public or collective activities, such as eaters engaging in conversations or discussions, exchanging information, learning table manners, telling stories and so on. Thus, the social, political and cultural consequences of the common meal are manifold and varied.

In this light, the *Jantar Popular* can be seen as a radical event, since the JP is an open invitation: anybody can go there and share in the meal. There is no need to book a place and there is no obligation to volunteer, though it is made very clear that without

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volunteers there is no JP. According to Inês, the JP is made possible by the space; the palace is an ideal location for hosting an event because of its unpolished, structural condition and the flaking traces of time gone by. She thinks that the JP is a good, *practical* intervention for GAIA to pursue as it is a perfect way to see politics, love and service in action. The communal dinner becomes a direct (political) action.

For Pedro the dinner is about showing people the possibility of having a decent, local meal at an economic price. At the same time it is an opportunity to politicize food: the perfect combination of making people aware of the politics of food and eating. Pedro was born in Coimbra in 1982 and raised in Guarda. At age 15, Pedro announced during a Saturday family dinner of *arroz de pato* (duck rice), that this was the last time he would eat food with animals in it, which was not an easy thing to do in Guarda in the mid-90s: there was not a single shop that sold tofu or soy beans. His diet consisted of potatoes, rice, vegetables and beans. *“It felt like a sacrifice to be vegan. But after a while I got used to it.”* (Pedro, 23/02/2009)

Pedro enrolled in Biology at the University of Porto in 2000. He had chosen Porto, because he did not want to get involved in the academic tradition of hazing in Coimbra. In Porto he did not encounter other vegans. The only place he could go out for food was at the local ‘*food for life* Hare Krishna’<sup>86</sup>. After one year, feeling isolated and lonely, he transferred to the University of Aveiro. When his then girlfriend moved to Lisbon, he transferred to the University of Lisbon, Faculdade de Ciências (FC-UL). On an Erasmus exchange program, he went to the Netherlands and Curaçao for 2 years. Pedro continued being vegan, until he met Inês in Amsterdam in 2004, after the *Ecotopia* gathering that took place in Gorinchem that year. As she was a lacto-vegetarian, he accepted to sometimes eat an egg or some cheese.

According to Pedro, the politics of eating is a means of communicating with the outside world, and is thus a matter of ecology. Production modes within the food system are directly linked to what surrounds us. Food and eating are so all-embracing that, in fact, they are a stepping stone into the world.

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<sup>86</sup> For an extensive study of *Hare Krishna* in Lisbon, see Araújo 2006.

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So what kind of commensality are we dealing with in the context of the JP? Based on the essay on the typology of commensality as proposed by Claude Grignon (2001), I would like to describe the commensality of the JP as an ‘intentional form’ of the commensal encounter:

We probably have to consider separately the special case where the guest group does not emanate from a pre-existent group, but is by itself its own purpose and its own expression. This is the case at encounter commensalities, extemporaneous, short-lived or at least temporary (which, however, do not gather completely at random), like the company at table during a package tour, for example, the company of travelers at dinner around an inn’s common table (*table d’hôte*), or, more or less stable but more lasting, the informal groups of regular attendants who meet at the café, the restaurant or the bar. These forms of commensality have in common that they occur on the fringe of habitual social life, within its parentheses and its interstices. (...) (C)ommensality is a result and a manifestation of a pre-existing social group. (Grignon 2001, 24)

At this point it is important to bear in mind the difference between commensality as an *expression* of identity and community, and commensality as an interface for exchanging ideas, opinions, stories etc. I will come back to this in the section on the TVZ.

It is time to take a closer look at activism in the Twenty-first Century.

### ***Global activism***

For the sake of specificity and theoretical clarity, it is necessary to have a closer look at what the term ‘social movement’ (SM) refers to and how it differs from a ‘social movement organization’ (SMO). As GAIA is officially a youth organization and a registered environmental non-governmental organization, it acts as a social movement organization (SMO).

Mario Diani (2000) proposes a concept of SM based on the synthesis of three analytical characteristics that many different authors<sup>87</sup> in the field of social movement studies

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<sup>87</sup> Diani focuses on the views by Ralph Turner, Lewis Killian, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, Charles Tilly, Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci. (2000, 157)

distinguish, though each through a different approach and in different wordings. Diani proposes the concept of social movements as: “(...) *consisting in networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.*” (2000, 156). Diani stresses that social movements cannot be single organizations since social movements are **networks** of interaction between different actors. (2000, 166). Hence his proposal for the social movement as an *analytical* concept.

In other words, a SMO can be part of an SM, and is not to be confused with the SM it is part of. “(...) *the study of individuals’ commitment to a specific movement organization, albeit of obvious substantial interest, is **not** specific to social movement studies. Rather, it is more directly connected to the broader analysis of individuals’ incentives to collective action and political participation.*” (2000, 170; emphasis by YIG)

With Diani’s proposal for having clear analytical boundaries when studying social movements and social movement organizations in mind, I have concentrated on the *Jantar Popular* as the subject of study, and not on GAIA as such, because GAIA is “*what the people who are there want it to be*” (Mara, in interview 21/02/2009): a loose group of ever changing volunteers with ever so many ideas – a social movement organization in constant flux. To study that flux would require a much larger time frame which goes outside the scope of this research.

The JP, on the other hand, is the weekly manifestation of a *direct action*, in which GAIA functions as a facilitator that provides JP volunteers with kitchen space and equipment, budget and location, independent of what GAIA is at that moment.

When I set out to research how people who had turned vegetarian or vegan for environmental reasons put their changed food habits into practice in the public realm, I thought initially that the JP was an act of consumer resistance in which mindful consumers took a stance on what they ate and showed it to the world - their mindfulness was based on new insights into the workings of the global food system. As a consequence, the mindful consumers turned their insights into practice by organizing a



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weekly vegan dinner to spread new ideas, demonstrating to people who were not vegetarian or vegan that a meatless meal is nevertheless a meal.<sup>88</sup>

However, the two most important aspects I could not tie in with the scholarly literature on consumer resistance I encountered were the emphasis by the informants on the horizontal, non-hierarchical organizational structure in GAIA and the consensus decision making this implies, and the buzz in the air when the JP going on, as if a party was in progress.

A possible explanation for the first aspect is given by Astra Taylor (2002). She argues that postmodern activist movements are structured in direct opposition to the hierarchical or pyramidal organization of the corporate world. In other words, the difficulty for contemporary activists is how to organize a group movement in a society that is perceived of and informed by postmodern theory as being fractured. Taylor (2002, 212) describes three significant characteristics of difference between the (pre-) May '68 activist movement and the current post-May '68 one:

1. Activists are not members of any one group but are participating on an individual basis in distinct groups with different focus and objectives that form alliances for a perceived common cause. She calls these groups 'affinity' groups;
2. There are no 'leaders', as groups are non-hierarchical;
3. Groups can be decentralized because of their strategic use of online communication technology to disseminate and share information to organize themselves.

I want to add the principle of 'groups make decisions based on consensus'<sup>89</sup> to these three characteristics. Consensus decision making entails the elaborate process of every member of the group having the right to speak and be heard, while the group as a whole needs to

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<sup>88</sup> Miguel described the Iberian concept of a meatless meal as a *prato vazio* – “a meal is not complete without meat - ‘the dish is empty’ without it.” (Miguel 15/04/2009).

<sup>89</sup> Through a link on the FNB website, the Consensus handbook can be downloaded at <http://www.consensus.net/> - retrieved 19/01/2009.

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take a decision unanimously. These four elements have both strengths and weaknesses. Strength in that it is very democratic and equal, weak in that it is a very slow process.

Concerning continuation in the light of the non-hierarchical structure, Inês sees it as a concrete problem that people usually stay up to ten months while being interns in GAIA.

People involved as coordinators, follow their own paths because they are young. It is staying versus transience. Since nobody stays on and the team always changes, this does not lead to the translation of ideas into practice.

The lack of continuity also weakens GAIA as an organization and is, in fact, a waste of resources. If some people would not put in a lot of effort in their own time, as volunteers, GAIA would have collapsed long ago. At the same time, the internships are the only way to get subsidies that make GAIA's existence possible in the first place. (Inês, 17/02/2009)

But be that as it may, the horizontal hierarchy is at least an ingenious experiment in circumventing 'normal' pyramidal power structures.

On the new social movements (NSMs), Anthony Giddens writes that:

(...) it is apparent that social movements now operate in a very different set of historical circumstances from those of earlier movements. In particular, processes of globalization mean that systematic and much more immediate connections across national boundaries become possible and, with this, the possibility of genuinely global social movements. (...)

These electronic networks now have an unprecedented ability to respond immediately to events as they occur, to access and share sources of information, and to put pressure on corporations, governments and international bodies as part of their campaigning strategies. (2009, 1021-1022)

The Web has become of central importance to social movements around the world - they can join forces in large regional and international networks twenty four hours a days, seven days a week. Through this globalization process, "*...we may be moving towards a*

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*‘social movement society’ in which the nationally bounded social movements of the past give way to movements without borders.”* (Giddens 2009, 1022). This is a very real possibility that may be confirmed by one look at GAIA’s *sala de convívio/biblioteca* and the *loja grátis* on the third floor. It is full of posters and flyers for campaigns in Lisbon, Portugal and the rest of the world. (See digital photo archive on CD-ROM.)

Environmental food activism has many forms. Some of the interviewees – Ariana, Mara and Marcos – have been involved in a practice called ‘freeganism’<sup>90</sup> while they were abroad. Ariana, was born in 1983 in Guimarães and grew up in Lisbon, where she attended a British private school. After a gap year, she went to study Marine Biology at the University of Plymouth in the UK. The first year at university she described as: *“A culture shock of cheap campus supermarket food and binge drinking and trying to fit in, while the 2nd year was the year of the people and the planet, in which I got involved in growing food at a local secondary school and in food activism.”* (Interview 22/01/2009)

Trying to deal with limits through consuming less, Ariana decided to become a freegan, ‘skipping’<sup>91</sup> supermarket dumpsters in search for ‘expired’ food thrown out by consumer society, but still perfectly safe for human consumption. I asked her to describe freeganism for me.

Freegans are free loaders, urban foragers, free food feeders. Freegans are disgusted with food waste: good food that could be used to feed certain pockets of society is thrown out because the legal expiration date on the label has been reached. Diving, for example, into Marks & Spencer’s bins, we would typically encounter stacks of same-day packaged foods like individual ready-meals, smoothies and heaps of packaged meat. We would have enough to feed 20 people all-weekend long. Sometimes we would even find spirits, wine, champagne, or chocolate. Sometimes we would encounter other groups and then we would fight over the food in the bins. Flowers were another bounty. We always found heaps of flowers, so our houses were always freshly decorated with them.

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<sup>90</sup> “Freegans are people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources. Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed.” Source [http://freegan.info/?page\\_id=2](http://freegan.info/?page_id=2) - retrieved 15/02/2009

<sup>91</sup> ‘Skipping’ is jargon for what is called ‘collecting expired food’ or ‘dumpster diving’.

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In the context of the ‘Bilston tree houses’<sup>92</sup>, the occupation of the trees was possible, because we could skip at M&S by night to feed ourselves, occupying the trees during the day. This is an example of a beneficial relationship: we were fed to fight the system by the system. (Interview 22/01/2009)

Is the protection of trees in the Bilston tree house protest against them being cut for making way for a road an example of trees being ‘romanticized’<sup>93</sup>, as suggested by Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World* (1996, 198vv)?

Being a freegan was also a way for Ariana to be able to pay for the MA course - for a year, she virtually bought no food, except for the occasional pot of Marmite. “*Most freegans are vegetarian.*<sup>94</sup> *but as the mainstay of the thrown out food is animal-based, some people including myself began to eat meat again, out of pity for the wasted animal.*” (Interview 22/01/2009)

Ariana observed that in Lisbon, having been back for a week at the time of the interview, she had not encountered a freegan as yet. “*I feel I lack an affinity group and I am upset I have no choice: freeganism in Lisbon makes little sense, as there is much less waste than in the UK.*” (Interview 22/01/2009)

Mara, who did her share of freeganism in Germany, ran into the same problem in Porto after she came back, as Ariana did in Lisbon: there was simply not enough thrown out food to feed the various competing groups – not only freegans, but the homeless and immigrants as well.

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<sup>92</sup> Bilston is a small village in Midlothian, Scotland. There is a proposal for a road bypass around this village, which is opposed by environmental activists who have built tree houses there since June 2002. See Derek Wall, *Earth first! and the anti-roads movement: radical environmentalism and comparative social movements*.1999.

<sup>93</sup> In the 18th Century, after centuries of having been cut down for making way for farmland or making ships, among other things, trees became treated with reverence – trees as the trigger for an aesthetic experience of nature.

<sup>94</sup> Ariana was a vegetarian as well, making an exception for when she caught and killed fish herself.

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Mara was born in Madeira in 1981, and raised in Amadora, Lisbon. In 1998, Mara enrolled in the the Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia of the Universidade Nova Lisboa (FCT-UNL), in Caparica, to study Environmental Studies.

Again – like she did at her public secondary school in Amadora - she met many people who were vegetarian<sup>95</sup>. Mara resolved to become a ‘part-time vegetarian’, only eating meat at home, at her parents’ place, though in minimal quantities and not every time. *“I didn’t tell my parents I was a vegetarian, because that would mean I had to be philosophically vegan, as either you are vegan, or you are ‘normal’, despite eating very little food derived from animals.”* (Mara, 21/02/2009).

During her first week at the FCT-UNL, Mara spotted GAIA in a university brochure. In the second week, Mara spoke about GAIA with G., who had become a member in 1997, in its temporary container, as GAIA did not yet have an ‘office’ on campus. For first year students it was compulsory to join a university association. She decided to join GAIA.

At the time, GAIA was trying to raise awareness about stray dogs and dog ponds, animal rights, do clean-the-beach actions, and to implement a recycling system at the university. In 2005 she and a friend moved to Dresden, Germany, to do an Erasmus exchange for 9 months.

*“There, I didn’t eat meat. I did eat the bacalhau (dried cod) my family sent me through the mail.”*<sup>96</sup> *When I eat meat, it is to be social with my family. When I eat fish, it is to be social with my friends in a restaurant situation.”*

After the Erasmus exchange, Mara went on an EVS program to Bad-Oldsloe, 30 minutes away by train from Hamburg, Germany. She characterized Bad-Oldsloe as an affluent suburb of 25.000 inhabitants, consisting mainly of rich pensioners and well to do families with kids. Her job was to manage a youth house and to dynamize social actions, as the house was a breeding ground for alternative youth networks. Although the food budget was tight, it was easy for the house to provide its food through dumpster diving, as Bad-Oldsloe had four well-endowed supermarkets that produced lots of waste - over

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<sup>95</sup> The food in the cafeteria was so bad, that the students staged a protest in which they insisted on the cafeteria offering vegetarian food the students succeeded in getting a vegetarian option in 2000.

<sup>96</sup> Mail plays an important role in her family. For example, her uncle in London has a vegetable patch where he grows veggies from Madeiran seeds. After harvesting, he sends his brother in Amadora, Mara’s father, packages of green beans. (Mara, 21/02/2009)

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20 people could eat from any one dive. “*But you can’t be (diet) conditioned, for you eat what you encounter, and not what you want.*”<sup>97</sup> (Mara, 21/02/2009)

Eating the freegan way was considered a political act by the German youth who frequented the house, but not by Mara, initially. After 5 months, things changed: the four supermarkets in Bad-Oldsloe tried to take back control over their dumpsters. They called in the police and started hiring private security to protect their garbage. Thus, the freegans had to revise their dumpster diving strategies. They split up into several groups in order to be able to cover more supermarkets<sup>98</sup>, further away. “*At first, the containers stood in the street. Then they were placed behind wire fences with a lock and in the end, the supermarkets constructed buildings to house the containers. Despite the obstacles, I gained 10 kg. I lived the good ‘lixo life’ - the good garbage life.*” (Interview 21/02/2009)

Marcos, is another experienced freegan. He was born in Lisbon in 1978, and attended the Faculdade de Ciências of the Universidade de Lisboa (FC-UL) to study Physics in 1996. Eventually he changed to Physical Geography at the Faculdade de Letras of the Universidade de Lisboa (FL-UL). In 2003 he went to Brussels to do an Erasmus exchange for one semester.

Marcos has worked as a volunteer on many occasions. He worked for *Cores do Globo*, a fair trade organization; *Quercus*, Portugal’s largest environmental organization; a parochia near his home; and *Amnesty International*. Volunteering in Costa Rica, he worked with an organization counting birds of prey. In Mexico he visited a *caracol zapatista*, a meeting point for foreigners and zapatistas<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> What food would be bought, depended on the ideas of the manager - Mara in this case. Sometimes, the house bought onions and olive oil and one time the house bought eggs, because the dumpster went without them for 3 weeks.

<sup>98</sup> “*Lidl was very good for vegetables and the nearby Plaza was the best for cheese. In one dive, e.g., they found 13 different kinds of cheese. It was promptly voted the best container in Germany.*” (Mara, 21/02//2009)

<sup>99</sup> “*The extraordinarily complex and rich history of political discussion and organizing in Chiapas from the 1970s to the 1990s produced something genuinely original, a new leftist language and vision. This includes negotiation about what it means to be Indian within a larger Mexican nation. It includes discussion about new forms of democracy and an inventiveness regarding civil society - exemplified by the convention in the jungle; by the Zapatistas’ national consultation, in which they asked people around the nation to comment and vote; by Marcos’s communiqués; and by the accords on Indian autonomy hammered out with government negotiators in 1996. The new leftist vision also includes a communication and public debate deeply rooted in popular cultural idioms - indeed, in the language of rock and roll and its progeny.*” Jeffrey W. Rubin (2002).

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While he was looking for a group in Lisbon upon his return, Marcos met L., who introduced him to GAIA. Meeting L., led to Marcos becoming a freegan. He participated in dumpster diving in the containers of *El Corte Inglés* supermarket in the *Beloura* shopping center, Sintra, a rich hunting ground. While dumpster diving in *Celeiro*<sup>100</sup> containers, he often met with fierce competition: from homeless people and immigrants, who had already been scavenging the dumpsters because they had little or no money to buy food – these people did not think of themselves as freegans. On such occasions the decision was made to let the people who were more in need, have the food.

He went to France to live in a squat for a year, where he continued dumpster diving and where he even spent a night in jail, when he was caught in the act by the police. Back in Lisbon, he contacted shop- and restaurant managers and succeeded in getting food from places like *Espiral* restaurant, and the market in São Pedro de Sintra for the squat in Sintra where he spends most of the week. These contacts provide him with fresh rather than expired food.

The *Jantar Popular* does not exist on expired food acquired by dumpster diving.<sup>101</sup> In Portugal what food shops throw out, is not enough to feed over a hundred people every Thursday. So in this sense the JP is not a radical political action. However, from the end of March onwards, bread made its appearance in large quantities, much to the satisfaction of the eaters.

As organic bread is a very expensive item, at least €3,50 per loaf, I asked Inês where the bread came from. She told me that some eaters, who lived near *Miosótis*, were now given expired bread from the shop, for the JP. When Inês thanked the owner of *Miosótis*, A., and asked if it were possible for the shop to give them expired vegetables and processed food in case this were to happen, A. looked puzzled. Apparently a man had been picking up expired food ‘for the *Jantar Popular* of GAIA’, for weeks. Shocked, Inês found out it had been J., a member of a squat in Sintra. She told A. that GAIA had nothing to do with J.

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<sup>100</sup> A chain of health food stores.

<sup>101</sup> The food is bought, see Chapter 3.

Inês and A. agreed that from now on expired food would be given on Wednesdays when GAIA volunteers came shopping.

So far, I have been discussing the ideological and organizational principles of the JP, against the backdrop of a global food system that seems to be spinning out of control. The next question is: what is happening during the JP, and for that matter, what is the JP?

### ***Deconstructing the Jantar Popular***

The moment a person walks through the gate and enters the courtyard of the Távora palace plot, inserted in the steep narrow Rua de Nazaré nº 21, it feels as if one steps into a different world. While remains of the wagons of last year's *marchas* are stacked into one corner of the courtyard, in another corner loud music blasts from what probably used to be stables and currently houses the workout unit with the heavy weightlifting equipment of the *Grupo Desportivo*.

To get to the *Centro Social do GAIA na Mouraria* (CSGM), one has to climb up an impressive set of marble stairs. Once upstairs, the labyrinth starts. Behind the entrance doors, straight ahead through the corridor, one passes various doors and the GDM trophy room on the left, full of cups won by GDM sports teams – the entrance to the *campo da bola* is on the right. The corridor makes a straight angle to the left, where Sr. Gomes' bar is located. I guess it used to be one of the palace's kitchens.

Continuing the corridor leads to the *Salão dos Matraquilhos*, with a parallel side corridor leading to the toilet section and one of the entrance doors to the *Salão Nobre*. Besides the table football table, it contains a huge snooker table that on the occasion of the JP is protected by a plastic cover and cordoned off with ropes. Inside the *Salão dos Matraquilhos*, to the right is the *Sala dos Reis* that derives its name from a complete collection of portraits of the former kings of Portugal. This room is adjacent to the outdoor terrace with a beautiful view to the castle. To the left is the *Salão Nobre* with its high ceilings and fado paraphernalia, such as *guitarras Portuguesas*, a black *manta*, a miniature podium and numerous references – both in writings and images - to famous fado singers who have graced the space the GDM calls 'sacred', with their singing.



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By now disoriented - unless one has the instincts of a homing-pigeon - one enters the spaces that will be turned into the JP.

In the article “Food Choice, Symbolism, and Identity: Bread-and-Butter Issues for Folklorists and Nutrition Studies” Michael Owen Jones (2007) argues that in nutritional studies the main emphasis is on diet and health, without taking into account what the symbolic aspects of food - in people’s everyday life - mean to them (Jones 2007, 162). While reading, I scribbled ‘*eating as activism???*’ in the margins.

Rereading the scribble a year later, I suddenly remembered Hakim Bey’s book *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (2003 [1985]). The book consists of three parts, of which part 3 about the *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ) is relevant for deconstructing the JP.

In sum, Hakim Bey, aka Peter Lamborn Wilson, an American anarchist, poet, and philosopher, argues that the creation of temporary spaces is a social/political tactic. Bey, in the role of prophet for building an alternative society, observes that in the formation of a TAZ, these temporary spaces elude formal structures of control.

According to him, the best way to create non-hierarchical systems of social relationships is to focus on the present and release one’s mind from the controlling mechanisms that have been imposed on it by society. The TAZ is not an end in itself but a tool to think with and act through.

Bey was inspired by the idea of ‘Pirate Utopias’<sup>102</sup> in the Caribbean in the Eighteenth Century. He describes a scattering of remote islands that formed an information network where pirates could hide, repair their ships, take in water and food, and trade objects. On these islands, mini-societies lived consciously outside the law for as long as they could hold out against the (colonizing European) authorities. The people on these islands lived as ‘intentional communities’. Bey conceptualized the TAZ in 1985, without giving an exact definition of the TAZ, as a TAZ is undefined by its very nature and can only be understood in action.

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<sup>102</sup> In *darkmatter*, an online journal, there is a special issue dedicated to pirates and piracy: “*This special issue of darkmatter “... sets out to examine the complicated and often incongruous cultural meanings assigned to pirates and piracy in the twenty-first century.”*” Source: <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/category/journal/issues/5-pirates-and-piracy/> - retrieved 07/02/2009.

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History says the Revolution attains ‘permanence’, or at least duration, while the uprising is ‘temporary’. In this sense an uprising is like a ‘peak experience’ as opposed to a standard of ‘ordinary’ consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day - otherwise they would not be ‘non-ordinary’. But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. (...) things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred – a difference is made. (Bey 2003, 98)

In the above context, it does not matter that the *Jantar Popular* is a recurring weekly happening – same event, same place, same time. The fact *that* every week, the JP needs to be constructed by volunteers – from planning the menu, till cleaning up the rooms at the end of the evening – contributes to the intention of creating a *place* where temporarily ‘something is about to happen’. During the rest of the week, the CSGM is limited to its spaces on the third floor.

According to Bey, each TAZ begins with its realization. As the TAZ is a simulation of the ‘anarchist dream’ of free culture, it can operate invisibly in the cracks and crevices of ‘State omnipresence’. The State, plotting out the territory, seemingly makes the map of the territory become the territory, a closed situation. However, as no map can ever be 1: 1 with every location at every instance, where the map is different from the territory, the TAZ can take place, opening up the territory.

These invisible cracks in a system of state power are reminiscent of what Yale professor of Anthropology and Political Science James C. Scott describes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1992 [1990]) as ‘public’ transcripts and ‘hidden’ transcripts, the crack being the equivalent of a hidden transcript. “*I shall use the term public*<sup>103</sup> *transcript as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate. (...)*

*If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term hidden transcript to characterize discourse that takes place ‘offstage’, beyond direct observation by powerholders.”* (Scott 1990, 2,4).

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<sup>103</sup> In a footnote Scott specifies: “Public here refers to action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and transcript is used almost in its juridical sense (procès verbal) of a complete record of what is said. This complete record, however, would also include non-speech acts such as gestures and expressions. (Scott 1990, 2)

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Though in a physical place, the *Centro Social do GAIA na Mouraria* does not exist juridically nor officially<sup>104</sup> as GAIA sublets its spaces from the *Grupo Desportivo*, who rents the palace from the municipality of Lisbon. GAIA calls the *location* of their offices CSGM. Even in terms of what constitutes GAIA and/or the CSGM is fuzzy because most of the week, the CSGM functions as an extension of GAIA activities in and around the office, the *sala de convívio* and the *loja grátis* on the third floor. It is on Thursday evenings that its presence expands onto the first floor during the *Jantar Popular*<sup>105</sup>, when it becomes a safe haven for practicing the ‘arts of resistance’, through intentionally eating vegan food. “*Whether open only to a few friends, like a dinner party, or to thousands of celebrants, like a Be-in, the party is always ‘open’ because it is not ‘ordered’; it may be planned, but unless it ‘happens’ it’s a failure. The element of spontaneity is crucial.*” (Bey 2003, 102-103).

The JP is an open invitation that extends to everybody and anybody as long as one respects the indications on the board of principles mentioned earlier. The invitation is accessible even to those without money, who can participate in the preparation and cleaning up of the JP. As a weekly recurring event, the JP is planned. Only on one or two occasions did I feel that the magic synergy among those present did not happen.

In the next section of this chapter, I will explain how the *Jantar Popular* can be understood as an event that turns into a place where commensality becomes a tool for activism.

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<sup>104</sup> This might explain why till to date the postal address has not been changed from the university campus in Caparica to the Mouraria – GAIA is a registered youth organization and ENGO that requires an official address.

<sup>105</sup> The classes of yoga and chi kung take place on the first floor wherever there is space, but that is a different situation from a JP, as then the space functions like a class room with a teacher teaching participants of the activity at hand.

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***In the Temporary Vegan Zone (TVZ)***

So far, I have dealt with certain aspects of commensality, activism and the concept of the TAZ. When these three ‘ingredients’ are applied to the JP, it becomes a TAZ where a certain kind of food, namely *vegan* food, is *intentionally* eaten in common. The space where the *Jantar Popular* is hosted, becomes a place, whether it takes place in the *Salão Nobre*, the *Sala dos Reis* or the *campo da bola*.

Therefore I think of the JP as a ‘Temporary Vegan Zone’ (TVZ), “*in which all structure of authority dissolves in conviviality and celebration.*” (Bey 2003, 102), and where ‘private and public spheres melds’ as “*the common meal leads to individual satiation and, as a result of commensality, has important social and public effects.*” (Hirschman 1996, 533).

In the Temporary Vegan Zone each person can *experience* food coming from a different food production system, while *eating in common*. The food is *not* just any kind of food, but a *specific* kind of food that is considered environmentally and socially just by the organizers of the JP.

In the TVZ, eating turns into a political act as commensality performs the double role of being both *the action* **and** *the tool* for transmitting the ideas behind the eating of vegan food. Thus, commensality is not only a community building tool through the shared eating of a certain kind of food, but a political manifestation expressed through eating this certain kind of food as well. In other words: the personal becomes political.

In the *Jantar Popular* as a direct action GAIA has found a fertile tool to launch its environmental and social concerns into the public realm. The synergy between the various, intentional elements that constitute the JP transform it into something larger, into a Temporary Vegan Zone. Being in the TVZ, lifts the eater, albeit temporarily, out of his or her everyday life and routines.

The TVZ is a place fertile with a charged and energetic potentiality for change. Bruner defines Victor Turner’s concept of the anthropology of experience as *lived* experience, as follows:

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(...) how individuals actually experience their culture, that is, how events are received by consciousness. By experience we mean not just sense data, cognition, or in Dilthey's phrase, "diluted juice of reason", but also feelings and expectations. As Fernandes points out, experience comes to us not just verbally but also in images. (...) Lived experience, then, as thought and desire, as word and image, is the primary reality. (Turner 1986, 4,5)

When I asked my friend M., nearly a year after he had participated in a JP, what he remembered, he answered: *"the festive atmosphere, as if a friendly party was in progress and the food, a chickpea curry without rice and salad, as I was late and the food was as good as finished."* This happened to be the same JP in which Julian participated for the first time and I had volunteered in the kitchen for the first time.

It should come as no surprise that many JP organizers would like to see a JP in every part of town, every day of the week. Bruno's ideal for the JP would be to have one everyday in another place around the city. He would like the JP to act as a 'dynamizer' in a city, or at least in neighborhoods.

Diana, a long time on-and-off member of GAIA, was born in Lisbon, in 1980. She started studying Environmental Engineering at the FCT-UNL in Caparica, in 1998, where she met Mara. She hooked up with GAIA as a shortcut *"to learn more about the environment."* During her undergraduate studies, she went to Gent, Belgium, in a SVE exchange context. Diana thinks that the *Jantar Popular* is a good example of GAIA at its best,

as it mobilizes a growing number of people. I would like the existence of more JPs in different places, organized by different groups. The JP is a meeting point that takes place on a regular basis with a system of voluntary workers in place. This makes it very easy to enter the group or to get to know about GAIA principles and activities.

The same people always seem to be doing all the work. When they stop doing it, the JP may cease to exist. I suspect that at the moment, more people come to the JP to have a good time and socialize among themselves, than to discuss social and environmental issues, or even the ideology of the dinner as a means to know why eating vegan, local and organic would be good for the environment. (Diana, 23/04/2009).

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What is interesting in this observation is that Diana describes the JP not only as a locale, a place to get acquainted with GAIA and become involved, but also as a means (tool) for informing/getting informed about certain issues of interest.

Mara thinks that:

The more people go to the JP, the more people become sensitive to the issues that preoccupy GAIA, such as GMO, fair trade and food politics. The economically priced meal creates a platform for people to meet and discuss politics.

The communal part is also important - that people eat together. At present, people often work alone at home, instead of in groups outside the house, and so they eat alone. The JP is a common ground for learning through play and it stimulates the growth of new networks. For example, it is good that people can realize they can prepare a dinner for many people by cooperating with each other. Contrary to Diana, I am confident the JP will be picked up by other people and will carry on. (Mara, 21/02/2009).

Again, the JP is described as a social space where eaters can make new connections with other people, and where people can eat a kind of food they might not be familiar with, or meet a kind of people who might help them see through the fog that surrounds the simple daily activity of eating.

And what if the eaters are considered participating actors in staging a public play, the play being the *Jantar Popular*? Then, perhaps the *Jantar Popular* can be seen as a manifestation of ‘communitas’,<sup>106</sup> as suggested by Victor Turner:

The dominant genres of performance in societies at all levels of scale and complexity tend to be liminal phenomena. They are performed in privileged spaces and times, set of from the periods and areas reserved for work, food and sleep.

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<sup>106</sup> “I prefer the Latin term ‘communitas’ to ‘community’, to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living.’ (...) It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society.” (Turner 1997 [1969]: 96,97)

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(...)

One may perhaps distinguish between secret and public liminality, between performative genres that are secluded from the gaze of the mass and those that involve their participation not only as audience but also as actors – taking place, moreover, in the squares of the city, the heart of the village, not away in a bush, hidden in a cave or secreted in a catacomb or cellar. (Turner 1988, 25,26).

Turner also believes that “*an increase in the level of social arousal, however produced, is capable of unlocking energy sources in individual participants.*” (Turner 1986, 43).

Coming back to Cele Otnes’ entry on consumption rituals in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007, 754), she writes: “*Functionally, consumption rituals can provide us with what Tom Driver (1991) describes as the ‘three social gifts’ of ritual – order, transformation and ‘communitas’.*” Applying the notion of the social gift to the *Jantar Popular* as a consumption ritual, the JP:

- 1 . as a weekly event provides structure to life and actions (order);
- 2 . transforms participants in either a slight or a significant manner because ‘eating in common’ becomes ‘activism through commensality’ (transformation);
- 3 . strengthens the social bonds with the other participants in the Temporary Vegan Zone (communitas)<sup>107</sup>

The observations made about the JP by people involved in its creation, strengthen my idea that the nature of the *Jantar Popular* is that of a public event staged to create a vegan Temporary Autonomous Zone in which people can simultaneously experience *and* expose themselves to new ideas through active participation.

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<sup>107</sup> And who knows, the social bonds strengthen maybe even with those in a peripheral network when back in the world of everyday life, when talking about the experience in the TVZ.

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Picture 6. Public in the *Salão Nobre*

*Some afterthoughts*

Once becoming aware that behind the industrially produced food they eat in general – and the meat they eat in particular – is a virtually invisible production-, distribution- and trade system at a global scale at work, some people may change their diets and become vegetarian or vegan.

The issues involved range from unsustainable environmental impact to agricultural subsidies, from neoliberal free trade and deregulation to the fight for food sovereignty, from corporate hegemony to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from peak oil to increasing food prices, from human and animal exploitation to the commodity market, and from biotechnology to world famine, and they are but a tip of the iceberg. And there are new and emerging issues, such as landgrab and neo-colonialism (Spiegel Online 2009; NY Times 2009) or nanotechnology (Joseph and Morrison 2006).

To be a vegetarian or a vegan in a meat eating culture is not simply a matter of ‘just doing it’. Therefore many of the informants sometimes eat fish or eggs, as a ‘social



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condiment' (Sara's formulation) that is, sharing the same food as the other people to be social with friends in a restaurant situation or with their family meals. Sara remembered a boy who wanted to be a vegan but didn't know how to do it, as he did not like fruit nor vegetables, only pasta with tomato sauce and soy products. Sara concluded:

To be vegan, you have to be curious, interested in food and enjoy food diversity; otherwise eating will easily become boring, mono-tuned and ends up having consequences for your health and the planet. In general, from the endless diversity of edible vegetables there are, we humans - in general - tend to focus on eating only about 20 different vegetable food items (such as soy, corn, rice, wheat, peanuts, tomato, potato, coconut, beans) (Sara, 11/02/2009)

In an age where the global food system is having a serious impact on the social and physical environment, previously 'oblivious' eaters start to doubt what it is they are eating. In the gap between being interested in changing to a vegetarian or vegan diet, or even just being curious to taste animal free food, and being a vegetarian or vegan, GAIA stepped in with the *Jantar Popular*. And for those who are already converted, as well, the JP is important, as it is pleasant to be in an environment where not eating anything coming from animals, is the norm and not the exception.

So how is one to understand organizations like GAIA and their actions? What is it that they do? What drives the activists?

Signaling the need for an alternative approach to the rationalist approach in social movement research, Andreas Pettenkofer suggests taking a different look at Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, as it:

(...) still offers unused possibilities for a theory of radical protest: it proposes an unfamiliar account of the relation between personal identity and political activism; it identifies mechanisms causing a dynamic of protest that cannot be reduced to a "rational" adaptation to an opportunity structure; and it opens a new perspective on the organizational form of radical movements. Thus, while helping to explain the new religious protest, it might also elucidate the working of movements that are not explicitly religious in character. (...)

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Weber also describes a general mechanism, which can explain how ways of acting that under the given “structural” circumstances appear to be quite improbable can nevertheless be stabilized. Through this argument, the Protestant Ethic becomes the starting point for a theory of a social change driven by radical movements. (2008, 253; 256).

In the *Protestant Ethic* (1958) Weber describes a system of sustained economic activity - developed by Reformed Protestantism despite their social environment not bestowing material nor status advantages upon its practitioners - as an activity that is *valuable for its own sake, unconstrained by the consequences of the activities*.<sup>108</sup> To be able to live like this during one’s lifetime was taken as a sign of salvation. Pettenkofer goes on to argue that:

(...) one of the central insights of Weber’s sociology of religion is that ‘world-rejection’ can be practiced in quite different ways: not only through ‘world-flight’ (e.g. withdrawing into a monastery or some other organization of “alternative” life), but also through a world-rejecting way of turning towards the world, which Weber calls ‘innerworldly asceticism’. In this way, a religious attitude not at all directed at changing the world may nevertheless motivate a way of acting that induces social change. (2008, 258)

I imagine that the energy that turns the *Jantar Popular* into a Temporary Autonomous Zone, a *place* that I have identified as a Temporary Vegan Zone, comes from the ‘innerworldly asceticism’ attitude: people who have changed their diet and stopped eating meat, or any food deriving from animals for environmental reasons, feel they are doing the ‘right thing’. As they cannot be sure *that* they are doing the right thing, they have to resort to introspection in order to make sure that they *are* doing the right thing to the best of their knowledge. A way of proving to themselves and to others that they are doing the right thing is through action, e.g. to volunteer for the JP.

As they do not care what others think of them or their changed behavior, and would love to see others do the same, though that is up to them, the energy generated through the intentionality and expectancy created through the JP as a tool for activism

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<sup>108</sup> Weber’s definition of ‘innerworldly asceticism’ (Pettenkofer 2009, 257).

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through eating in common, lifts the JP to a higher, more energetic plane, suggestive of Turner's idea of social arousal (1986, 43). This 'buzz' can lead to introspection among the eaters who, under the influence of the buzz created in the TVZ, experience that it *feels* good to do the right thing, while the volunteers, *know* they are doing the right thing in that moment *because* of the buzz.

I have tried to capture the *Jantar Popular* on digital photo camera. When I showed these pictures<sup>109</sup> to people without any explanation of the context and asked them to tell me what they saw, unanimously they wondered aloud if the pictures were from a sect – usually a religious one. Mystified I asked what they meant, to describe what made them think of a sect. They responded that it was the way people were portrayed, that they looked very 'together as a group' and that people were 'smiling and emanated a sense of peace'.

To me it seemed curious that group behavior around food brings out the association in people's minds of a sect. I decided to pursue the 'sect theme' which proved enlightening.

Anthony Giddens describes 'sects' as being: "(...) *comparatively small; they usually aim at discovering and following 'the true way', and tend to withdraw from the surrounding society into communities of their own. (...) Most have few or no officials, all members being regarded as equal participants.*" (2009, 689).

Though I would never consider GAIA a sect, Giddens' description does resemble that of a social movement. What are the comparisons?

Social movements like religious movements challenge mainstream values. In both cases people's discontent is based on a *belief* that things should be different. People set out to try to change themselves and society. In the case of social movements the unease and need for change are directed at perceived negative developments in society while those of religious movements are directed at the established church.

Both social and religious movements consist of communities of believers that '*set themselves up in protest*' (Giddens 2009, 688;1018) *against* what has become respectively of politics/society and religion/the church.

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<sup>109</sup> See the digital photo archive on the CD-ROM in the back.

This comparison is not random, as “*religious movements are some kind of **subtype** of social movements in general.*” (Giddens 2009, 690; bold added by YIG).<sup>110</sup> Not surprisingly, religious movements as a subtype of the broad category ‘social movements’ must have certain shared characteristics. In fact, people’s associations with the photographs of the *Jantar Popular* seem to confirm Giddens’ statement. This also confirms that GAIA is not a sect, but a secular new social movement organization.

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<sup>110</sup> In order to avoid the negative connotation attached to the terms ‘sect’ or ‘cult’, the phrase new religious movements has been coined for the emergence of “*the broad range of religious groups, sects and cults.*” (Giddens 2009, 690).

## NO PLANET B

My point is already clear: this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this man of negation – yes, even he counts among the very great forces which conserve and affirm life...

-- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Its urbanization, progressing steadily, had finally reached the ultimate. All the land surface of Trantor, 75 000 000 square miles in extent, was a single city. The population, at its height, was well in excess of forty billions. This enormous population was devoted almost entirely to the administrative necessities of Empire, and found themselves all too few for the complications of the task. (It is to be remembered that the impossibility of proper administration of the Galactic Empire under the uninspired leadership of the later Emperors was a considerable factor in the Fall.) Daily, fleets of ships in the tens of thousands brought the produce of twenty agricultural worlds to the dinner tables of Trantor....

Its dependence upon the outer worlds for food and, indeed, for all necessities of life, made Trantor increasingly vulnerable to conquest by siege. In the last millennium of the Empire, the monotonously numerous revolts made Emperor after Emperor conscious of this, and Imperial policy became little more than the protection of Trantor's delicate jugular vein....

--Isaac Asimov, *The Foundation Trilogy*

In *The Foundation Trilogy*, Asimov describes the evolution of the planet Trantor – population 40 billion people – to eventually become the administrative ‘Capital Planet’ of an imaginary future galactic empire. For its food, Trantor depends on imports from twenty other agricultural planets, to feed its population that is either busy with the administration involved in running the galactic empire or doing maintenance on the planet itself. This food dependency proved to be Trantor’s imperial Achilles heel.

Asimov based his future vision on Rome during the Roman Empire at its height. Thomas Homer-Dixon in *The Upside of Down* (2006) uses the construction of the Colosseum in Rome to take a closer look at what happens when a society can no longer meet its energy demands – be it food in the Roman case or oil (which partially equals food) in our contemporary context. Homer-Dixon and his research assistant calculated the amount of calories needed to construct the Colosseum. What is striking is that over

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seventy five percent of the calories went into food for the oxen<sup>111</sup> that were used to transport the stones and rocks needed for its construction (2006, 48). The rest of the calories went into feeding the workers a mainly vegetarian diet (2006, 49). The calories providing the energy, of course, came from the crops that were produced on the land.

The Romans then focused this energy – they used their food batteries, so to speak – to create a productive, resilient, and phenomenally complex system of public buildings, manufacturing facilities, housing, roads, aqueducts, and social organization. And here’s the punch line: recent research shows that the Roman empire was eventually unable to generate enough high-quality energy to support its technical and social complexity. (...) The empire tipped into irreversible decline because it couldn’t feed its energy hunger. (Homer-Dixon 2006, 42)

The fate of the Romans or the imaginary Trantorians emphasizes the importance to study food in society, if only because there is no ‘Planet B’ to save us.

I have sketched a myriad of interconnected themes that make up a fraction of the contemporary reality of the global food system. The increased production and consumption of livestock has been the central lens through which I looked at certain developments in society. Because meat is a prestige food at the top of the food chain, people will usually eat more meat the moment they have more money. The verdict is still out there whether these developments are demand- or supply driven. In the meantime they attract policies and investments with an eye on meeting demand, further enhancing the pressure on the environment by subsidizing the supply side. Thus, changes in food consumption patterns have enormous consequences for the environment. A growing body of scientific research suggests that the industrial production of meat has a detrimental effect on the environment and suggests adopting a less meat-centered or even vegetarian/vegan diet.

The environmental consequences of each person’s dietary choice depend on the way people as a collective choose to eat. According to Stern (2000), pro-environmental

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<sup>111</sup> As opposed to grazing, because the oxen needed to recuperate quickly from their hard work (2008, 49).

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behavior is influenced by four types of variables. The first one, personal capabilities, refers to the individuals knowledge, available time and money, social status and power, as well as socio-demographic variable and personal resources. The second variable consists of contextual factors, such as physical, social, economic and political variables. The last two variables are considered psychological factors: attitudinal factors (environmental and non-environmental attitudes, beliefs, values and personal norm) and habit or routine.

Throughout this dissertation the focus has been on the *Jantar Popular* as a direct action by volunteers involved with GAIA, an environmental activist group in Lisbon, firmly inserted in global environmental social movements. I use the analytical concept of ‘social movement’ c.f. Mario Diani “*as **networks** of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.*” (q.v. p.55).

GAIA’s intend is to bring about individual and social change through direct actions such as the *Jantar Popular*. The JP proposes the alternative of a vegan diet as a political strategy to counter the dietary pressures provoked by the global corporate food system.

In the *Jantar Popular*, GAIA has found the perfect tool for political activism through commensality. When people eat together in a group, they bond around the food. When the food that is eaten is connected to global economic, political and social trends, the meal turns into a consumption ritual that becomes a political act.

As such, they are part of a vast counterculture movement spanning the globe that has its roots in, for example, the dietary reform movements in Europe during the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Those movements were opposed to the ‘modern industrial urban diet’ of animal proteins, sugar and alcohol (Carton 1912) replacing the traditional diet of grains and starches. These groups established a link between dietary reform and reforming the way of life and society. Not only vegetarian and naturist groups embraced this mission, but it was also adopted by political movements such as the anarchists and intellectuals like Henry David Thoreau. His book *Walden* would inspire the

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counterculture of the 1960s, which in its turn inspired contemporary global counterculture groups like GAIA.

What is new in contemporary social movements is that through the Web they are operating in a set of new historical circumstances – made up by global electronic networks. Thus, through these networks the new social movements can organize themselves at very short notice. In fact the Web has become the core of global activism. Anthony Giddens speculates that we might be on our way to become a ‘social movement society’ that will enable social movements unconstrained by national borders.

The possibility of society becoming social movement based makes the study of a group such as GAIA rather relevant in order to understand how these new organizational forms are constituted, on what kind of incentive individuals decide to act and how these open networks operate.

With this dissertation cum ethnography I hope to have made a distinctive contribution to the field of food studies in general and to the anthropology of food in particular, by writing about a relatively unknown environmental group that uses commensality to further their cause.

Once again food has proven to be an incredibly analytical tool to think with.

***Post Script***

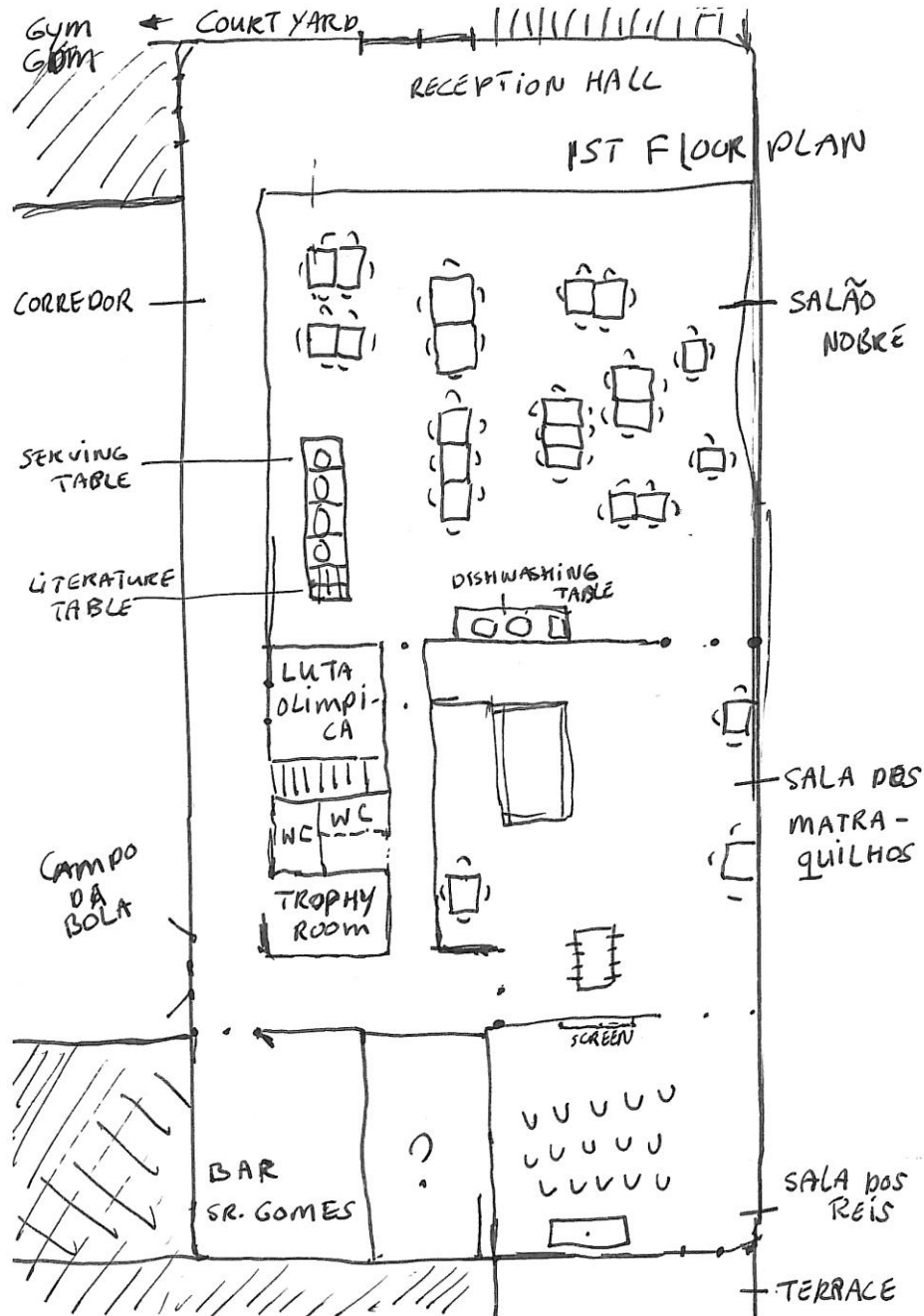
A week before handing in this dissertation, I went to the *Jantar Popular*, to check out the drawings I did of the spaces as I remember them. I was struck by the fact that except for Sr. Gomes, my Dutch companion T. and *Jantar Popular* regular, and Virgil, I did not see any familiar faces. Just before the food serving started, however, I ran into Marcos, and before I left, Sara came in. I marveled at the regeneration of both the volunteers and the public. Be that as it may, the ‘magic’ happened - for a few hours I found myself immersed in the Temporary Vegan Zone of the *Jantar Popular do GAIA*.

Lisbon, February 16, 2009



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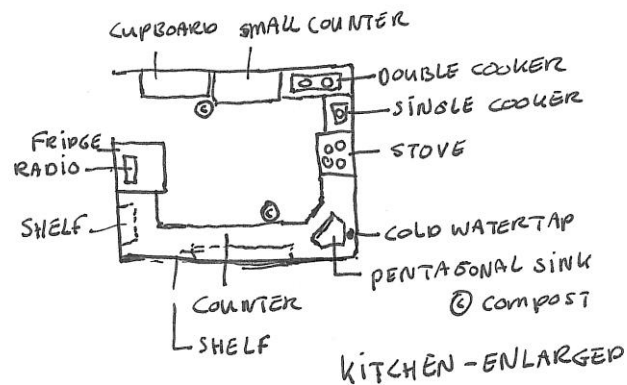
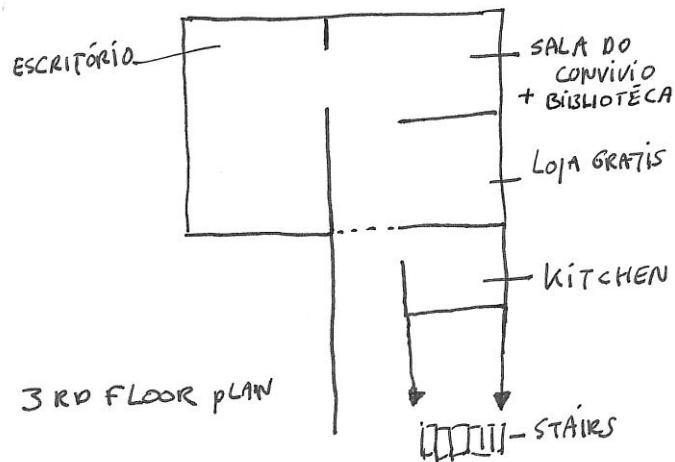
APPENDIX I



Drawing of the first floor of the Távora palace.

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APPENDIX II



Drawing of the third floor of the Távora palace.

### APPENDIX III

#### **Bem-vind@s ao Jantar Popular do Centro Social do Gaia**

Encontram-se num espaço não discriminatório, aberto a todas as pessoas que aceitem e respeitem a diferença das demais, independentemente de etnia, credo, nacionalidade, orientação sexual, idade ou rendimento social.

#### **O que é o Jantar Popular?**

!Um convite ao convívio de pessoas diferentes com princípios semelhantes.

!Um jantar comunitário vegano (não se consomem produtos de origem animal).

!Uma iniciativa inteiramente auto-gerida por voluntários do Centro Social do GAIA.

!Um projecto autónomo e auto-sustentável. As receitas do Jantar Popular representam o fundo de maneo do Centro Social do Gaia, que mantém assim a sua autonomia.

!Um exemplo de consumo responsável, com ingredientes que respeitam o ambiente, a economia local e os animais. !Uma oportunidade de aguçar o pensamento crítico e trocar conhecimentos. !Uma oportunidade para divulgar modos de vida alternativos e sustentáveis. !Realiza-se todas as quintas-feiras no GDM – Grupo Desportivo da Mouraria.


#### **Princípios do Jantar Popular**

1. Ninguém fica sem comer por não poder \$\$\$. Se ajudares nas tarefas do Jantar, devolvemos-te o dinheiro.
2. Deixamos sempre o espaço melhor do que o encontramos.
3. Cada um@ lava o seu prato e talheres.
4. Cada um@ leva as garrafas para o ponto Vidrão e o plástico para o ponto Embalajão.
5. Só fumamos no sítios designados, junto às janelas.
6. Este é um espaço comunitário, tod@s contam, tod@s participam.
7. Este Jantar pretende devolver à alimentação a importância devida. Todos os ingredientes são cuidadosamente escolhidos numa óptica de sustentabilidade ecológica e social.
8. Este Jantar só é possível com voluntários. Se gostas de cozinhar ou ajudar, inscreve-te na lista do Jantar!

APPENDIX IV

# WASH YOUR OWN DISHES

"If you can't wash, it's not my revolution." Dilemma Goldman



**DEMOCRACY**  
Even as a dishwasher, you deserve a say in which politician is best suited to protect the economy that keeps you in the kitchen

**NATIONALISM**  
Forget about those dishes for a second—you're a citizen of the proudest nation on earth!

**LIBERTARIANISM**  
Dishwashing is the only business that makes the owners profit even more

**FASCISM**  
The Mexicans who washed the dishes are deported, the Jews who owned the place are imprisoned, and everyone else is conscripted for military service

**UNEMPLOYMENT**  
The only thing worse than being trapped in a dishroom is being trapped outside one

**CAPITALISM:**  
You wash the dishes, the ones who own them profit.

**NEOLIBERALISM**  
"Wash 'em, 'em, 'em!"  
The dishes are shipped overseas to be washed and you're free to develop your own combination of Unemployment and Nationalism

**REFORM**  
Smaller stacks, warmer water, longer breaks—same dish!

**SOCIALISM**  
Dishwashers' wages increase just enough to afford higher taxes

**COMMUNISM**  
From each according to his means, to each according to his need—as determined outside the dishroom

**ANARCHISM:**  
We all share in the dishwashing.

**SYNDICALISM**  
The dishwasher joins labor syndicates that send representatives to a council, at which it is decided which dishes are to be washed and when

**ANARCHA-FEMINISM**  
You wash dishes for your boss—who washes the dishes at home?

**ANARCHO-PRIMITIVISM**  
Down with dishes!

**ANARCHO-PUNK**  
Down with waiting!

**INSURRECTIONARY ANARCHISM**  
A quixotic attempt to distill a political theory from the practice of smashing dishes

Crimethinc: Food Service Escapes / po box 2113 / Greensboro NC / 27402 / www.crimethinc.com

Education through dishwashing. Source: <http://www.crimethinc.com>

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**APPENDIX V**

DATE	EMENTA	MENU	PAX	€
22 Jan 2009	Caldeirada de seitan	Vegetable stew with seitan	63	
05 Feb 2009	Esparguete à bolonhesa de soja	Spaghetti bolognese of soy		
12 Feb 2009	Lentilhas à indiana	Indian lentil curry		
19 Feb 2009	Couscous com Grão de bica e abóbora & salada prensada de couve	Couscous with chickpeas and pumpkin & pressed cabbage salad	85	€81,83
26 Feb 2009	Jardineira de seitan	Mixed garden vegetables with seitan	120	€41,96
05 Mar 2009	Peixinhos de horta com arroz malandro à Sr. Gomes & salada de tomate	Vegetable tempura with bean rice & tomato salad	120	€120,45
12 Mar 2009	Chili sortido com abóbora & salada de cenoura e cove roxa e arroz integral	Assorted bean chili with pumpkin & carrot-red cabbage salad en brown rice	180	€120,45
19 Mar 2009	Arroz de tomate, migas de tomate & salada com pão	Tomato rice, tomato bread mesh & bread salad	125	€84,80
26 Mar 2009	Buffet de humus, tabuli, salada de feijão frade, salada verde, salada de arroz + pão	Buffet with hummus, tabouleh, black eyed pea salad, green salad & a rice salad + bread	145	€121,25
02 Apr 2009	Feijão branco com funcho, arroz carolina integral & salada de cenoura com rabanete & maçã	White beans with fennel, brown Carolina rice & carrot – radish & apple salad	140	€211,00
09 Apr 2009	Hamburguers de aveia com tabuli & salada verde	Whole oat flake hamburgers with brown rice & green salad	105	
16 Apr 2009	Caril de lentilhas com arroz integral, salada de beterraba & cenoura, torta de maçã	Lentil curry with brown rice, salad of beetroot & carrot, apple cake	140	
23 Apr 2009	Caldeirada de Grão de bica, tabuli, salade verde	Chickpea stew, tabouleh & green salad	133	
30 Apr 2009	Menu de aniversario de Inês: salada de feijao adzuki, pure de batata doce picante, salada de espinafre japonês, salada de cenoura e cove roxa e laranja, tarte de maçã	Birthday menu for Inês: adzuki bean salad, spicy mashed sweet potato, Japanese spinach salad with sesame seed, carrot-red cabbage-orange salad, apple cake	122	

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